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ABSTRACT

This collection of essays exemplifies the universal theme that competence in language is key to success in learning and in life. The research studies reported in the collection offer insights into the challenges of literacy learning in Asia: social, cultural, and linguistic factors that sometimes constrain the teacher's approach to instruction. While coming from different Asian educational systems, the essays reflect similar themes and concerns. Following an introduction, essays in the collection are: (1) "Literacy Instruction in Taiwan: Teachers' Beliefs and Their Classroom Practices" (Chem Chiou Lan); (2) "The Composing Processes of University Student Writers: A Comparison across Two Competence Groups" (Antonia Chandrasegaran); (3) "Learning English in Hong Kong Pre-School Centres: A Research Project" (Ng Seok Moi); (4) "Promoting Second Language Development and Reading Habits through an Extensive Reading Scheme" (Vivienne Yu Wai Sze); (5) "Use of Action Research in Exploring the Use of Spoken English in Hong Kong Classrooms" (Andy Curtis); (6) "A Study of Extensive Reading with Remedial Reading Students" (Propitas M. Lituanas, George M. Jacobs, Willy A. Renandya); and (7) "Second Language Writers' Knowledge and Perceptions about Writing and Learning to Write Strategies" (Kwah Poh Foong). Short reports are: (1) "The Message of Marking: Teachers' Attitudes to the Writing of ESL Students" (Vivian Li Yuk Yi); (2) "An Investigation of EFL College Students' Listening Comprehension: A Case Study of Cadets Studying English at the Chinese Military Academy" (Chen Li Jung); and (3) "The Effects of Well-Written Texts and Glossaries on the Comprehension of Academic Texts" (Evy Chrysanti Ridwan, Purnama Wahyuningsih, Etika Noor). (Each essay contains references.) (NKA)

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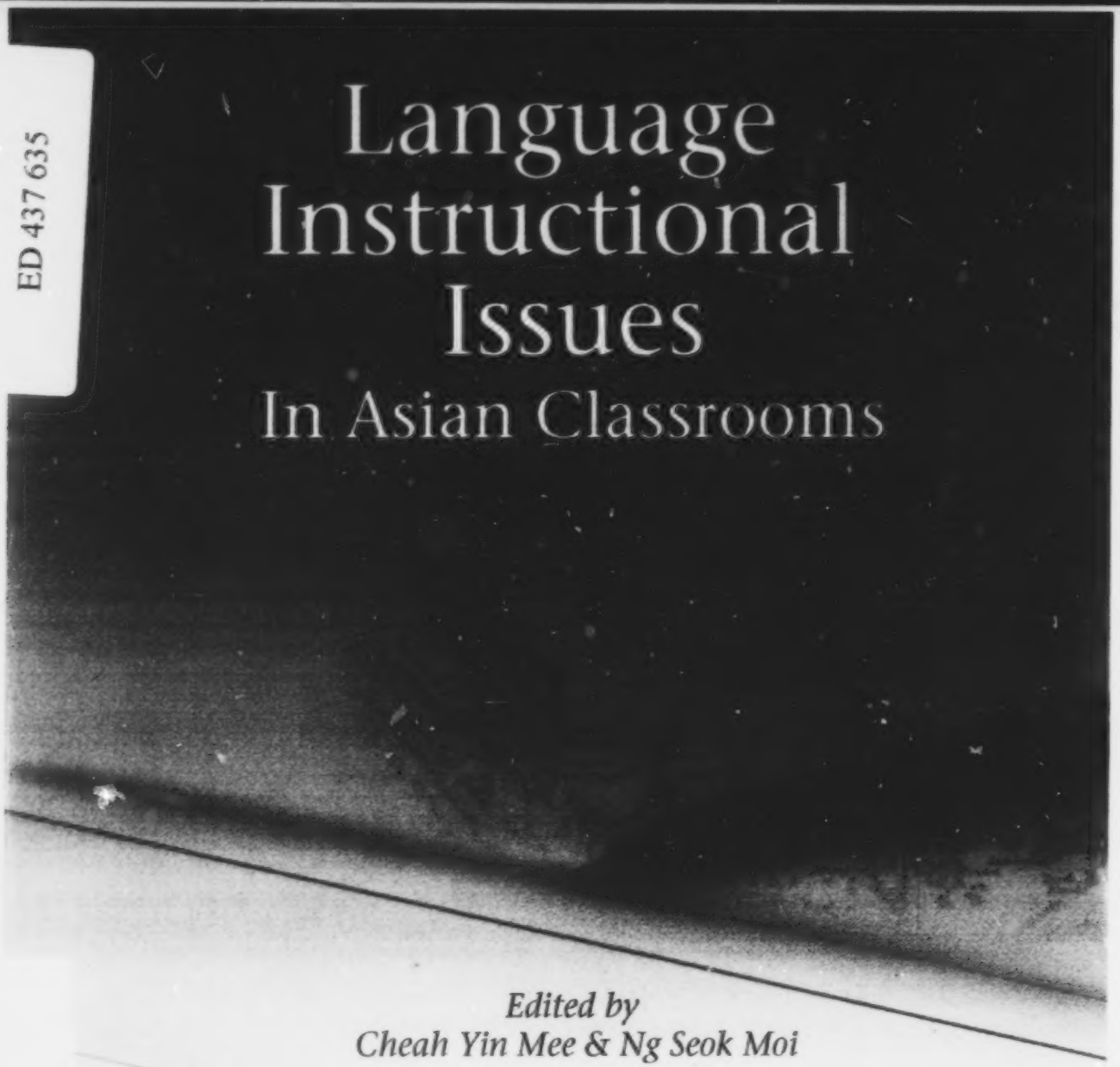
Language Instructional Issues

In Asian Classrooms



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The International Development in Asia Committee (IDAC)
A standing committee of the International Reading Association (IRA)

Language Instructional Issues
In Asian Classrooms

Edited by
Cheah Yin Mee and Ng Seok Moi

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The International Development in Asia Committee IDAC
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Foreword

This collection of essays exemplifies the universal theme that competence in language is key to success in learning and life. The research studies reported offer provocative insights into the challenges of literacy learning in Asia: social, cultural, and linguistic factors that sometimes constrain the teacher's approach to instruction; complex social interactions in classrooms that sometimes produce unanticipated language behaviours from students; and tensions teachers face in attempting to balance the mismatch between external expectations of prescribed curriculum and the reality of student performance and progress. Although the studies are situated in Asia, the messages speak to all educators concerned with reading, writing, and language instruction. Furthermore, the references accompanying each report provide evidence of the vast dissemination of research within the literacy community. This combination of constructive research reports and extensive bibliographic references are invaluable to anyone pursuing the study of language learning at all levels.

The co-editors, Cheah Yin Mee and Ng Seok Moi, deserve special recognition for their work on this volume. They have been diligent in their efforts to create this important publication. The work is a tribute to their understanding of the importance of language competence and to their tenacity in seeking out contributors whose work addresses the needs of a variety of students.

Ng Seok Moi, Chair of the International Development in Asia Committee (IDAC) of the International Reading Association, has for several years encouraged colleagues to explore the idea of creating a publication devoted to language and literacy issues in Asia. With her IDAC counterparts, she has investigated the potential for an academic journal to serve literacy educators. I was privileged to be included in some of the conversations about the prospects for such a journal. All of us involved in those early discussions realized the enormity of the undertaking to create a journal using only volunteer resources.

Consequently, Cheah Yin Mee and Ng Seok Moi decided that a more manageable and realistic first step would be to create an anthology addressing literacy issues and drawing upon the expertise of researchers throughout Asia. The result is this impressive collection of research reports.

Joan M. Irwin
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Newark, Delaware, USA

Introduction

Three years ago, the International Development in Asia Committee (IDAC) made a decision to publish a collection of papers in an effort to encourage scholarly research and writing in the Asian region. This first anthology on the theme 'Language Instructional Issues in Asian Classrooms' is aimed at documenting studies specifically related to language teaching and learning. Although there are a number of working languages in the region, a decision was taken to publish the anthology in English in order to disseminate the research to a wider international audience.

While we had hoped for papers that dealt with the teaching and learning of a number of different languages, we found that most of the submissions discussed issues related to the teaching and learning of English. This is particularly true of papers received from Hong Kong, Singapore, the Philippines and Brunei. This collection is inevitably more focused on instructional issues related to the English language in Asian classrooms, and these have proved to be equally interesting and relevant to our cause.

The response to this first anthology has been extremely encouraging. Out of a total of 24 papers from nine countries, 19 were short-listed for blind review by our panel of 32 reviewers, some of whom reside outside Asia. After the review process, 11 papers were selected for revision. In the end, seven papers were returned, and three more were abstracted as short reports for the volume. We are very grateful to all who responded to the call for papers and to our reviewers who have given their time and energy to the selection process.

The papers

These papers provide glimpses into language teaching and learning in many different classroom contexts in Asia. While coming from different educational systems, the papers reflect similar themes and concerns. For example, two papers deal specifically with extensive reading while another paper ends with a call for more extensive reading. Three are about some aspect of writing. This in

turn suggests that these issues, particularly related to learning English in schools, are common concerns across countries. Only one paper, (Chern's) deals with literacy in a native language. The rest are about teaching and learning English in different contexts; as the main language of instruction in Singapore, as a second school language in Hong Kong and the Philippines, and as a foreign language in Indonesia, Taiwan and to students from the People's Republic of China (PRC).

Chern's paper about Taiwan classrooms deserves special attention because it discusses literacy learning in Chinese. The teaching of Chinese has traditionally been associated with rote learning and teacher-dominated instruction. Chern's study confirmed that teacher-fronted elementary classrooms and highly organized sequential instruction are the norm. Those features do not always mean poor learning because these classrooms also displayed much student discussion and active participation. The observations showed that teachers had organized many opportunities for students to share experiences and to interact with their peers as well as with the teacher. However, Chern expressed her concern at the teachers' over reliance on textbooks, which resulted in few real, book-based activities in the classroom. Her suggestion to include extensive reading in the literacy curriculum reflects the growing awareness of the importance of authentic reading and real texts in the acquisition of literacy in any language.

Unlike the rest of Asia, English is the main school language in Singapore. It is often referred to as the first language, despite the fact that it is not the home language of most of the population. Chandrasegaran's paper investigates how university students in Singapore write in English, for academic writing is a skill much in demand in tertiary education. She looks at the composing ability of writers with different levels of competence, and concludes that the moderately competent writers are more aware of the larger rhetorical context of communicative purpose than the less competent writers. From these findings, the author recommends that writing skills might be improved through explicit teaching and guided discussions of specific writing strategies belonging to the more competent writers.

In the context where English is used as the medium of instruction for some subjects in the school system, we have several papers looking at reading, writing, and spoken English. Four papers look at the situation in Hong Kong, while one paper describes a school project in the Philippines. The focus of these papers is on improving the teaching of English. Ng discusses the problems

of pre-school children learning English and describes the design and implementation of a new English curriculum for Hong Kong pre-school children. Her description of the impact of the innovation on the children's language learning and the teachers' professional development will be of interest to many educators. Yu describes an extensive reading project that is used to improve English language learning and to promote reading interest among upper primary and secondary school children in Hong Kong. Curtis explores the issues related to the use of spoken English in Hong Kong secondary classrooms through engaging teachers in action research projects. Li's short report discusses Hong Kong teachers' attitudes to and the effectiveness of their feedback to lower secondary children's writing in English. The issues and concerns raised in these papers about improving English language learning is clear indication that English is still in great demand in this former British colony.

Lituanas, Jacobs and Renandya's paper is also about extensive reading, but it is used for remedial students at a public secondary school in southern Philippines. Generally, secondary school students are known to be less motivated readers compared to elementary students although the need to read is just as great. The study explores the use of extensive reading in a remedial context to address the problem of a lack of reading and poor language skills. The school described in this study has to contend with more acute problems than those faced by other schools in this collection. This school lacks reading materials, and most of the students come from low-income families. Nevertheless, encouraging results were obtained in the study.

The rest of the reports are set in contexts that have a strong national or native language policy and traditionally the role of English is described as that of a foreign language (EFL). The role of English remains significant in many educational systems such as Indonesia, the People's Republic of China and Taiwan. Kwah describes a situation that is increasingly common in Singapore — many Asian students are coming to Singapore for English immersion lessons. Of these, some need immersion classes to improve their English so that they can study in Singapore's educational institutions which use English as a medium of instruction. The students from the People's Republic of China that Kwah describe fall into this category. Her findings remind those of us who are engaged in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), or general teaching for that matter, that there is often a disparity between our teaching goals and objectives and those of our students'. Such disparity can be the cause of students' inability to learn well. In addition, the findings also support conventional wisdom about

building EFL teaching upon the knowledge, beliefs and strategies acquired from first language learning.

Chen's short report describes a study in Taiwan where Chinese army cadets learning English as a foreign language were taken through a series of tasks to describe their listening comprehension skills. She found that effective listeners have many different alternative strategies they are likely to choose from rather than a single best strategy.

Ridwan *et al*'s study, on the other hand, looks at Indonesian students and their strategies for comprehending expository texts. Their findings do not support the main hypotheses that well-written texts and a glossary will help students comprehend better. These findings throw up questions for future research.

Readers interested in research methods will find that a variety of research methods and procedures were employed in the studies reported. Most of the studies are descriptive-analytic in orientation (see papers by Chandrasegaran, Chern, Chen, Kwah, Li, Ridwan *et al*). Others have the classical experimental-control design (see papers by Lituanas, Jacobs & Renandya, Ng and Yu) while Curtis puts his study in the realm of action research. The descriptive-analytic samples are small; for example, 12 university students in Chandrasegaran's study, four teachers and their class in Chern's study. The experimental-control designs employ larger samples of teachers and a few hundred children (see the papers by Ng and Yu). Only one study (see Ng) employs a longitudinal design but an interesting variety of instruments are used in the different studies. Most studies restrict themselves to using one or two instruments; mainly questionnaires, interviews, proficiency tests and self-reports. The study by Chandrasegaran warrants mention in that it used a variety of instruments; video-taping of pen movements, observation of writer behaviour, simulated recall of process and process logs. Ng, in her study, utilized questionnaires, a battery of language tasks, observations, video-tapes of classroom activities and journal entries.

Conclusion

In all, these papers give readers a taste for the different kinds of research studies as well as a glimpse of various situations in Asia where English is used as the medium of instruction, a second school language or a foreign language. In many cases, they reveal attitudes to the language, discuss strategies for language learning and describe teaching methods and approaches.

We recognise that a limitation of this anthology is that it is published in English, and that has been somewhat of a deterrent for many of our Asian scholars who are more proficient in their native languages. This suggests that there is a role for translation and multilingual publications, issues that need to be taken up by various members of IDAC in their respective countries. We hope that it will be possible to progress to such publications in the near future, for they should capture more of the diversity that will provide a complex but intriguing quilt of information and description about Asian classrooms.

This publication was made possible by a generous grant and support from the International Reading Association. We would like to thank them for their help, and our gratitude also goes out to all our contributors, reviewers, IDAC members and everyone else who contributed to this first anthology.

Cheah Yin Mee, Singapore
Ng Seok Moi, New Zealand
August 1999

Literacy instruction in Taiwan: Teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices

Chern Chiou Lan

Introduction

Literacy instruction is an important component in elementary school education. Students' overall school performance is determined by what they have learned in their early school years. In an era that is packed with information and technology, reading serves not only as an avenue to success in life but also as a requirement for basic survival. Though discussions of beginning literacy instruction in English speaking countries abound, little has been mentioned about current classroom practices in Chinese literacy education in Taiwan. The researcher therefore ventured to carry out a study through interviews and classroom observations to document teachers' beliefs and their classroom approaches in elementary school literacy instruction.

Literature review

The question on whether some methods and approaches in beginning literacy instruction are more effective than others has been raised by many teachers. Before an answer can be attempted, it is necessary to review existing methods and approaches to literacy instruction. According to Aukerman (1984), there are as many as 165 approaches to beginning reading, which can be categorized into six groups: phonetic, code symbol-sound, whole-word, natural reading, management and total language arts and eclectic approaches.

Bond and Dykstra (1997) also identified at least six instructional methods from a review of existing literature. Basal reading programs rely on graded reading series and have been widely adopted by schools in America for many years. The initial teaching alphabet method uses 44 letters, 24 from the English alphabet and 20 new ones, to print texts to help English speaking children read in the early stage. Phonics methods emphasize teaching the relationship

between sounds and letters in English pronunciation. Linguistic methods apply the scientific knowledge of language to teach reading. Individualized methods refer to the use of a combination of approaches to accommodate different children's needs. Language experience methods treat language skills of speaking, listening, reading, and writing as an integrated unit.

Since Aukerman's and Bond & Dykstra's (1997) categories can further be subsumed into two major trends of reading instruction, the code-oriented approach and meaning-oriented approach, only these two approaches are discussed here. Of these two approaches, phonics method, an example of code-based approach, and whole language method, an example of meaning-oriented approach, have dominated the debate over reading literacy education in English speaking countries for decades. They are therefore further discussed in the following sections.

Advocates of the phonics methods claim that since school children already have enough oral language to understand stories with complex structures which are read to them, instructional emphasis in the early stage should focus on building connections between sounds and print. In an alphabetic language like English, the printed code has a system of connecting letters and sounds; therefore, responsible reading teachers should tell beginning readers directly what that connection is (Beck & Juel, 1992). The phonics methods of teaching have gone through a few changes, from explicitly drilling students through isolated sounds to a more implicit look-say method. But, regardless of implicit or explicit teaching, the proponents of this approach believe that developing decoding skills early is important because mastery of decoding skills predicts reading comprehension skills (Beck & Juel, 1992; Stanovich, 1986) and leads to broader reading interests in and out of school (Juel, 1988).

On the other hand, the proponents of whole language emphasize a meaning-oriented approach to reading. To the advocates of whole language, too much emphasis on decoding of words will break language into meaningless pieces and interfere with the natural learning experience. For them, language acquisition and learning to read should be done naturally and meaningfully in an environment that is friendly and rich in print and texts. The advocates of whole language believe that comprehension, rather than accurate word level pronunciation, is the main goal of reading. They believe that as long as children are encouraged to read, meaningful association of children's previous experience will result in comprehension (Goodman, 1992).

More recently, literature-based literacy instruction and balanced instruction have been advocated (Freppon & Dahl, 1998; Scharer *et al*, 1993) and new literature-based basal programs with more engaging content and few adaptations have been introduced (Hoffman *et al*, 1998). Freppon and Dahl's (1998) review of balanced instruction showed that though differences existed in the theoretical base and the interpretation of classroom practice, advocates of balanced instruction in beginning reading aimed at striking a balance between teaching explicit skills and the wholeness of reading.

In this discussion of the efficacy of different teaching methods, where are elementary school teachers' voices? What are teachers' philosophies and classroom practices? Baumann *et al* (1998) analysed 1,207 surveys answered by elementary school teachers in America and found that a majority of teachers did not hold an either-or view towards phonics and whole language methods. Instead, they employed a balanced approach to elementary language instruction. From the survey results, Baumann *et al* (1998) described an archetypal primary grade teacher as having these characteristics:

> This teacher embraces a literature-based perspective, combining trade book reading with the reading of a basal anthology selection. The daily activities include reading aloud to children; providing their time for children to engage in self-selected, independent reading; creating opportunities for discussion and oral expression; engaging children in oral and written response-to-literature activities; scheduling journal writing and process writing periods, and directly teaching phonics skills, other word identification skills, and comprehension strategies (p.646).

Though criticism of literature-based perspectives to literacy is not unheard of (Scharer *et al*, 1993), what is important in this description of American elementary school teachers is that a balanced instruction that integrates phonetic skills and holistic teaching is the approach adopted by most American teachers. If according to Baumann *et al* (1998), the archetypal American primary grade teachers are eclectic in teaching, what is an archetypal Chinese elementary school teacher like? Also, does the debate between whole language and phonic methods affect reading instruction in Chinese elementary schools when the language is not phonics-based?

Perfetti and Zhang (1996) described Chinese reading instruction with a focus on code learning, from *pin yin* in the first eight weeks to the mastery of 2,500 characters by the end of the second year. They also pointed out that phonetic components in Chinese characters created an issue similar to the debates between code-based reading and sight-reading. Traditional character

teaching methods, e.g., the distributed method, made no special efforts to the teaching of characters that shared the same phonetic components, whereas the more recent concentrated method, similar to code-based reading, grouped characters that contained the same phonetic components together and taught them as a set. However, there is no information on how these methods are put into classroom practice. Classroom observation data is needed to see how these methods are carried out.

Based on the observation of Chinese language and literacy instruction in a second grade classroom in China, Hudson-Ross and Dong (1990) found that Chinese classrooms were impersonal. In other words, Chinese teachers rarely asked students for personal responses to the text; they used concentrated character learning method and emphasized character decomposition and analysis (Hudson-Ross & Dong, 1990). Other than character studies, students were also called on individually to recite or read aloud part of the text. Reading aloud in unison was another common activity observed by Hudson-Ross in China.

A study of literacy instruction in Hong Kong was done by Kam *et al* (1995), who listed a number of factors that they thought might affect Chinese language teaching effectiveness. They first pointed out that literacy classrooms in Hong Kong were teacher-centered with lecturing being the most popular method. Also pointed out by Kam *et al* (1995) was that the teaching procedures always started with the introduction of the author of the text, followed by reading the text aloud, explaining the meaning of words, structures, and the themes of the text, and finally ended with students doing exercises on the text. Kam *et al* (1995) stated that the focus of teaching was too dependent on textbooks; also, rote learning and intensive drilling were commonly advocated by teachers. Hudson-Ross and Dong's (1990) and Kam *et al*'s (1995) descriptions of reading classes in China and Hong Kong showed that these literacy classes focused on language studies rather than reading for meaning or pleasure. Can these observations be extrapolated to other Chinese language and literacy classrooms? Are Chinese language classes in Taiwan conducted in a similar manner?

An observation report of classrooms in Taiwan was provided by Stevenson and Stigler (1992). Their study on elementary school classroom organization found that in Taiwan, teachers were the center of children's activities 90% of the time and the lessons were presented coherently with an introduction, a conclusion, and a consistent theme. From their observation of elementary math classes in Taipei, Stevenson and Stigler (1992) concluded that Chinese teachers engaged their students in the lessons and relied on students to generate ideas

and evaluate the correctness of ideas. These are, however, observations made on science classes rather than language classes in Taiwan.

In a cross-cultural study that compared how school children in Taipei, Sendai (Japan), and Chicago learned at school, Stevenson (1992) observed classrooms in Asia and America. He found that Asian classrooms were more organized and teachers employed skills that were 'more effective in attracting and maintaining children's attention' (p.75). In the same study, Stevenson asked children to rate their own abilities in mathematics, reading, sports, and in getting along with other children. He found that, among all three cultural groups, Taipei children had the highest self-rating for reading. What made these Taiwanese children have such high self-esteem in reading? What went on in the reading classrooms in Taiwan that built students' confidence in reading? This study set out to explore the answers by interviewing teachers and observing reading classes of Taiwanese schools to tap their instructional activities.

Design of the study

In this study, interviews and classroom observations were conducted to observe how Chinese teachers perceived the goals of Mandarin literacy classes and how they carried out literacy instruction. Four teachers were interviewed and their classes observed to analyse the classroom activities to achieve instructional goals.

Two elementary schools in a central part of Taiwan were contacted as sites for this study. The principals of the two schools were briefed on the purpose and design of this study. After consultation with the principals, two classes from each school were invited to participate. The four teachers who had been briefed were interviewed about their teaching goals and classroom practices (*see Appendix for interview questions*).

The interviews and observations of reading instruction were done in the second month of the second semester to allow teachers ample time to get into their classroom routines. Each participating class was video-taped two times a week for two weeks. The audio-taped interviews and video-taped classroom activities were transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Findings and discussions

Grade 1 and Grade 3 teachers' interview results were summarized. Teachers' opinions on questions related to classroom practice, i.e., teaching goals, teaching activities, and time allocation in class were collected. Class observation results

were presented to show classroom activities teachers and students engaged in. Details of these activities were, however, not included in the summary.

Teacher interview results

Four teachers, two each from Grade 1 and Grade 3, were interviewed individually to tap what they thought the goals and teaching emphases of Mandarin literacy instruction were. They were also asked how they allocated their class time and how they evaluated their students. The results of this interview were summarized and included in the following section.

Goal of the Mandarin language program

The two first-grade teachers interviewed agreed that the final goal of the Mandarin program was to promote students' reading, speaking, and writing abilities to enable students to use Mandarin to express their thoughts. One Grade 1 teacher pointed out that language was a tool for communication, so students should learn enough vocabulary in Mandarin language classes to express themselves. The other Grade 1 teacher understood that the goal for this course was for students to learn speaking, reading, and writing in Mandarin. She, however, interpreted writing as character writing because composition writing was too difficult for Grade 1 children.

Besides learning words, the two Grade 3 teachers added composition-writing to the list as one of the very important goals in Mandarin classes. They also believed that introducing different genres to students would boost students' reading and writing abilities.

Teaching activities

For first-grade classes, the teaching emphasis was on reading, speaking, and handwriting (from phonetic symbols to character writing). The correct stroke sequence in a character was emphasized but sentence or story writing was not included. One of the Grade 1 teachers, Ms Y, expected responsible teachers to emphasize accuracy in minute detail in character writing. She, however, believed that communicating ideas was more important. According the other Grade 1 teacher, a typical lesson should begin with the article of the lesson, usually a narration, then move on to sentences, phrases, and then new words. After that, the exercise book would be used to consolidate learning through sentence-making and other exercises that required thinking. In other words, for both Grade 1 teachers interviewed, teaching was an integrated process that started from whole to parts

and then the parts were pieced to become whole again, which was in line with the principle of balanced approach. Also, Ms Y commented that each school's policy emphasis should be incorporated into teaching activities, too. For example, Ms Y's school emphasized poetry, so teachers in her school would encourage poetry appreciation and writing in class.

Third-grade teachers added another dimension to these activities: they stressed expansion activities like making sentences and sharing personal experiences related to the article or story read. In other words, third-grade teachers gave their students more opportunities to use oral language to either reflect on or share their personal experiences on the topics related to the lessons in the books.

Time allocation for teaching a lesson

Both first and third-grade teachers agreed that it would take four to six 40-minute class periods to cover a lesson thoroughly. The lessons usually included: warm-up (to explain the story and its main ideas to motivate students); close-up (to teach characters, their radicals, and stroke sequence as well as textual meanings); expansion (to combine characters to create words, and combine words to make sentences and to share personal experiences); and consolidation (to practice through listening, speaking, reading, and writing from pictures). For some teachers, consolidating activities would take two periods; for others, expansion or warm-up activities would take more than one class period. This description of a teaching unit showed that these Chinese teachers conducted their classes with an identifiable focus, either a linguistic unit or the theme of a specific lesson.

Testing and student evaluation

The paper-pencil tests were administered monthly and the test items were similar to the ones in students' exercise books, i.e., writing characters, assigning phonetic symbols to characters, making phrases and making sentences. Other than written tests, all teachers reported that class performance and participation were also taken into consideration when evaluating students. However, no clear weight was reported between school tests and other performances in evaluating students' overall performance in the course. One Grade 1 teacher indicated that chatting with students was important to know how much their language skills had developed. However, she also commented that not much time was allowed in the classroom for teachers to chat with students because

there was much to be covered in the book.

This summary of teacher interview results showed that the goals of reading instruction progressed from the teaching of basic language elements in speaking and reading, i.e., a code-based approach, to the emphasis of longer discourse to express ideas in speaking and writing, a meaning-based method. Similar to Stevenson and Stigler's (1992) observation of Chinese classrooms, the teachers interviewed in this study reported a very coherent and structured approach to their classroom activities. In other words, the teachers reportedly used a series of steps to teach a lesson thoroughly. Though Grade 1 teachers reported more emphasis on vocabulary than Grade 3 teachers did, all four teachers described a variety of classroom activities. Contrary to the common belief that Chinese classes are conducted like a monologue, all teachers in this study reported the importance of encouraging students to participate and contribute ideas in class.

Classroom observations

The following discussions of classroom approaches are based on the video-taped lessons of reading classes conducted by four teachers, two each from Grade 1 and Grade 3 classes. Sixteen class-periods of four class settings are included in the following discussion. The description focuses on what teachers and students did in class to achieve literacy teaching and learning.

Observation results of Grade 1 classes

In these two Grade 1 classes, both teachers appeared thorough in covering material in the textbooks, using many activities to achieve that goal. Both teachers modelled character writing to emphasize the correct stroke order by asking their students to write on the air with them.

Grade 1 teacher, Ms T, involved students in many physical activities like writing on the board and animating the story. She also employed oral reading and choral reading in class. When students read in unison, Ms T emphasized rhythm and speed so students would not drag on while chorusing. Students were called on fairly equally; ample opportunities were provided for students to use language creatively. These classes conducted by Ms T showed some scaffolding activities: she brainstormed and wrote answers on the board before asking students to write on their own; she modelled oral reading to emphasize the rhythm of the Chinese language; she also enlightened the class through a dramatization of the text that engaged all students.

In Ms Y's classes, two of the four classes observed were devoted to workbook exercises, during which Ms Y reserved time for students to do quiet seatwork while she walked around to offer individual help. In the two classes in which Ms Y introduced new lessons, details of lexical entries were not emphasized. Expansion activities to use language learned were more commonly seen than word-analysis activities. This was consistent with what Ms Y reported in the interview.

The two Grade 1 classes observed in this study revealed some similarities in structure. The lesson always started with a warm-up activity, mostly through chorus reading or questions, to review previous lessons. The bulk of the lessons contained various activities to consolidate learning, and the lessons either ended with quiet seatwork or another review session similar to what took place at the start of the class. Also, both teachers invited students to write on the air with them while teaching the writing sequence of new characters. This arm writing activity magnifies the movement of hand writing and helps students see the correct way of writing characters through observing their own arm movements as well as their teacher's and classmates'. This writing practice not only illuminates the sequence of writing a specific character but also engages students in physical movements to break the monotonous seatwork activities. Arm-writing is frequently observed in Mandarin literacy classrooms when new characters are being taught.

Observation results of Grade 3 classes

Like Grade 1 teachers, the two Grade 3 teachers engaged their students in textual comprehension activities as well as linguistic learning activities. In other words, these two Grade 3 teachers emphasized attending to lexical details as well as extracting meanings from the text. Their activities involved students as a group as well as individually.

The observations of Ms C's class showed that students were very attentive in general though only about one-fourth of her students participated actively in class discussions. Ms C devoted more time to text comprehension and workbook exercises and not so much to word analysis. She did not seem bothered by the fact that certain students dominated discussions in class and the majority of students didn't participate much. After all, most of the time, her students either read or answered questions in chorus.

Another Grade 3 teacher, Mr N, arranged the tables in hexagons so students sat in groups of six. All students appeared relaxed and comfortable in

this class. Mr N spent more time on word and sentence-building activities because, according to his interview report, his students enjoyed those activities very much. He personalized his class activities by using students' names to form sentences. The classes were conducted like big discussion groups and students participated by directly giving their answers aloud to the class. Occasionally, Mr N would call on individual students to answer questions.

These two Grade 3 teachers were very consistent in what they reported doing and what they did in class. One teacher focused more on comprehending and expanding meanings from the text and the other stressed more on vocabulary and sentence-building to enrich language experience. The structure of these Grade 3 classes was similar to Grade 1's in that they also started with warm-up activities like chorus reading and discussions. But, unlike Grade 1 classes, Grade 3 classes usually have more extended and integrated activity to consolidate the focal learning point.

Discussions

These observations of Grade 1 and Grade 3 Mandarin literacy classes showed that reading classes in Taiwanese elementary schools utilized various activities. All classes observed had a preparation stage, a reading stage, and a discussion stage in the teaching procedures. Though basically a teacher-fronted instructional style, students interacted with teachers actively to ask or answer questions and to share personal experiences related to the target lesson. Unlike what Hudson-Ross and Dong (1990) claimed that Chinese classrooms were impersonal and students' personal responses to classroom content were rarely elicited, the classes observed in this study were full of student-teacher and student-student interactions; that is, these teachers actively engaged students in expressing and sharing ideas. Besides working through exercises in the workbooks, first and third-grade teachers fostered reading comprehension through dramatizing the stories, summarizing the reading and relating students' experiences to the stories. One difference between Grade 1 and Grade 3 classes observed by the researcher was the amount of disciplinary and behavioural instruction the teachers used in class. Grade 1 teachers spent more time in class on disciplinary issues than Grade 3 teachers. Students' difference in familiarity with school settings explained this difference in classroom talks.

This study also found teachers very loyal to their textbooks and workbooks. These texts were used nationwide in Taiwan and had been the only one version

of elementary textbooks for many years. The observations showed that teachers felt obliged and pressured to teach everything in the textbooks and they used these books to the utmost. They didn't seem to have time to include other literacy activities like engaging their students in extensive reading and book reports. They, however, have managed to include a wide range of activities to engage students individually or as a group.

It is very difficult to portrait the archetypal Chinese elementary school teachers based on the results of this study because the four teachers in the study showed different class dynamics. However, some similarities among these teachers can be synthesized to form the following description:

The teacher is religious about using textbooks. Classroom activities cover teacher-led discussions and teacher-fronted instructions based on the materials in the textbooks. The teacher designs class activities to either enlighten the story in the book or elaborate/reinforce a lexical or linguistic focus of the lesson. The teacher engages students in group-work activities like brainstorming, choral reading, and discussion; the teacher also invites individual work by calling on students to answer questions or do quiet seatwork. Decoding exercises as well as activities for creative language use are included. This teacher usually takes the role of a leader in class.

This picture of Chinese elementary school language teachers is similar to what Baumann *et al* (1998) portrayed for American teachers; both Chinese and American teachers employed balanced instruction that reflected a whole-part-whole approach to integrate discrete language structures into holistic reading activities. However, unlike American teachers who used a literature-based perspective and introduced many outside materials to their classrooms, Chinese teachers were very dependent on textbooks and devoted their class time to cover textbooks thoroughly and exclusively. This textbook-based approach is common among Chinese teachers in China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan probably due to the frequent administrations of standardized examinations in Chinese education systems.

Conclusion and suggestions

This study set out to see how Chinese literacy instruction was conducted. It surfaced from the classroom observations that Chinese literacy classes were conducted with a textbook-based approach that included micro-level word analysis exercises and macro-level comprehension activities through teacher-

fronted instructions and discussions. Also, creativity in language use was strengthened through brainstorming of ideas and ways of using language to express them. Overall, students were actively engaged in classroom activities, though some participated more than others. Interview and observation results showed that teachers consistently employed an organized and coherent classroom instructional style and were in control of every step in teaching. These teachers emphasized forms as well as content of language; they employed reading aloud to reinforce structure and brainstorming to stimulate creativity. However, no evidence of using stories or other non-textbook materials surfaced during observations or in interviews.

It is worth noting that literacy instruction in Taiwan is conducted with more emphasis on cognitive learning of linguistic elements than affective stance of appreciating the materials read. Though whole language and literature-based approaches are not advocated in Chinese classrooms and teachers are not familiar with these concepts, the idea of broadening students' reading experiences through extensive reading is not new. Elementary school students in Taiwan are frequently asked to read a few favourite books during semester breaks and report to the class in the new semester. Teachers in Taiwan need to incorporate this story reading project into regular classroom activities to broaden students' horizon of literacy experience. Instead of assigning long stories during semester breaks, teachers can ask students to read shorter stories on a weekly or daily basis to share with their peers. Teachers can also choose stories with themes similar to the ones in the textbook to reinforce the learning of linguistic elements and help students expand their reading scope. Incorporating a variety of authentic materials to supplement textbooks will open the window to the world of reading for students. The idea of extensive reading, therefore, needs to be added to the literacy classrooms in Taiwan.

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APPENDIX

Teacher interview questions

1. What do you think the goals of Mandarin language in elementary school are?
2. What do you think the teaching focus should be? What are your main teaching activities?
3. How do you allocate time in teaching vocabulary, text comprehension, oral reading, workbook, and other activities?
4. How do you evaluate your students? What is your focus when you test your students?

The composing processes of university student writers: A comparison across two competence groups

Antonia Chandrasegaran

Problem and background

The problem that motivated the research reported in this paper is ineffective academic writing among English-medium university students in Singapore. Ineffective writing, defined as a product, is characterized by any combination of some or all of these flaws at whole-text level: absence of a consistent thesis or unequivocal overall claim, inadequately supported or unsupported claims, contradictory or irrelevant grounds facts for supporting a claim, (Currie, 1994), an organization frame ill-suited to the rhetorical purpose of the text, failure to address the lecturer's question directly, and unexplained shifts in topic. At the paragraph and sentence levels ineffective or poor writing is manifested as coherence gaps, ambiguity of reference, weak cohesion, absence of transition and reorienting signals, and ill-defined topic idea in the paragraph. With students who have had ten or more years of English study and exposure to the language, ineffective writing is more than just 'poor English' or 'funny English' (Prior, 1995, p.69), although grammatical errors may contribute to lack of clarity.

I have defined ineffective or unsuccessful writing in terms of rhetorical and textual inadequacies rather than linguistic deficiency because of the background of Singapore university students with respect to their English language learning history and their university teachers' expectations. On admission to university, students in Singapore have had 12 years of English-medium education, having studied all school subjects in English except for mother tongue lessons under Singapore's 'bilingual education for all' (Pakir, 1995) policy. When students qualify for entry into university they are presumed to have the skills required for writing essays and other academic products in English just as if they were native speaker students in a university in Britain or North America. As in any university in an English-speaking country, the criteria

employed by faculty in a Singaporean university to evaluate student writing are not centred on grammar, but on academic discourse conventions and intellectual engagement with disciplinary content (Leki, 1995).

Despite the years of English-medium schooling and wide use of English among Singaporean students, the reality is that not all students admitted to university have the skills for participating successfully in written academic discourse. In any cohort of freshmen there is a continuum of writing competence ranging from command of the skills to generate effective argumentative and expository texts with none of the flaws described in my definition of ineffective writing above, to so serious a lack of such skill that every piece of writing is riddled with most or all of these flaws. The students at the lower end of the continuum need guidance to raise their writing competence to a level that will enable them to produce coherently presented essays that meet the expectations of their content course teachers.

An in-depth understanding of how poor writers function cognitively during writing would facilitate the provision of the precise kind of guidance they need to become better writers. The writing process being mostly covert, it is difficult for teachers to tell with any certainty, from reading a completed poor quality essay, what ways of thinking and mindset attended the inept choice of ideas, inappropriate organization structure, and less than coherent paragraphs in the final product. This study is an attempt to add to current understanding of the mental functioning of less competent student writers relative to their more competent counterparts by investigating the nature of their decision-making during pauses in the act of composing.

Objectives of the study

The general objective of the study was to examine the cognitive composing behaviours of a group of university student writers to discover how composing decisions and decision-making strategies differ between better writers and their less competent classmates. Since previous research has shown that better writers and poorer writers differ in approach and manner of composing, (Flower and Hayes, 1980, 1981; Sommers, 1980; Faigley and Witte, 1981; Hayes *et al*, 1987), the current study was planned with the aim of obtaining a more precise picture of the difference, focusing on decision making at extended pauses during writing and specificity of plans at the outset of writing. The study's objectives were:

1. To determine how Moderately Competent Writers (MCW) differ from Less Competent Writers (LCW) in the kinds of decisions made during extended pauses in the act of composing.
2. To discover differences in planning behaviour between MCWs and LCWs in planning strategies during extended pauses and specificity of pre-writing plans.
3. To discover how MCWs and LCWs differ in the way they make revising decisions during extended pauses.
4. To discover if MCWs and LCWs differ in awareness of rhetorical considerations and global parameters at pausal decisions, as other research (e.g., Flower and Hayes, 1980; Hirose and Sasaki, 1994) would have us believe.

Theoretical framework and brief review of literature

This section will first describe the main features of the cognitive process model of writing in which this study is grounded, before reviewing the literature relating to the significance of pauses during writing and the main research findings on the composing processes of skilled and unskilled writers.

The cognitive process theory of writing (Flower and Hayes, 1981b) a theory that has guided much research and discussion on writing in the last two decades (e.g., Matsuhashi, 1982; Rose, 1984; Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1987; Kirkland and Saunders, 1991; Penningroth and Rosenberg, 1995) represents writing as a problem solving, decision making process. The problem the writer has to respond to is the rhetorical problem which is the task environment consisting of audience, writer's role in the discourse, and situational context including the text produced so far (Flower and Hayes, 1981b; Hayes, 1996).

In the cognitive model of writing the activities of planning, 'translating' ideas into visible text (Flower and Hayes, 1981b) and reviewing recur throughout the act of writing and are not discrete sequential stages as believed by earlier writing researchers (e.g., Rohman and Wlecke, 1964). Planning is a composite of a number of component processes, setting goals, generating ideas/language, selecting, and organizing; while reviewing, termed 'reading' in Hayes' (1996) updated version of the model, involves evaluating what has been written against criteria for the text and then deciding on improvement. All these recurring composing activities being largely covert mental processes, writing researchers who subscribe to the cognitive model have to infer the workings of the

composing mind by analysing overt behaviours, such as pauses (Matsuhashi, 1981), or writers' self-reports obtained through stimulated recall immediately after the completion of writing (Rose, 1984).

The cognitive content of pauses has been the subject of study since the 1980s. The research of Flower and Hayes (1981a) and Matsuhashi, (1981) established that planning (idea generation, selection, organization, etc.) occurs at pauses in the composing process. A more recent research finding that planning requires more effort than translating (Penningroth and Rosenberg, 1995) may be regarded as further confirmation that planning takes place during pauses throughout composing. The effort required in some planning decisions may be so demanding that translating comes to a halt which is observable as a pause in scribal activity. Since reviewing, like planning, is a recursive process in the cognitive model, we can expect some pauses to be occupied by the reviewing of plans and of the text already written. Flower and Hayes' investigation of pauses (1981a), although expressly aimed at studying the nature of planning, mentions the reviewing of goals as one activity occurring during pauses.

The literature is less comprehensive about how successful and less successful writers differ in planning and reviewing processes during pauses. A recent study on three Southeast Asian student writers (Bosher, 1998) reports some differences between the pausal composing behaviours of more successful and less successful writers. The writer of the highest score essay in Bosher's study attended to the gist and overall organization of her essay many more times than the lowest score writer. But a more detailed analysis of the effect of writing competence on decision-making during pauses was not done by Bosher as hers was only an exploratory study.

Much of what we know of the difference in composing behaviours of good and poor writers comes from studies on students for whom English is the first language (L1), a fact that raises the question of the applicability of L1 research findings to L2 students. However, the L2 label is hardly an apt description of many students in the English language context of Singapore where 24.5% of pre-primary students speak English to their parents (Tham, 1990). A higher percentage of all students speak English outside the classroom in social interaction or in official or business transactions, English being Singapore's language of education and key official language. By the time students qualify for university, English is the dominant language for many as far as the written medium is concerned. The L2 label is a misnomer when their

compositions exhibit the flaws reported of less successful L1 writers inadequacy of support, unrelated arguments, failure to reorient reader at paragraph boundaries (Hult, 1986), failure to specify warrants, and equivocality of claims (Currie, 1994). For students well past the intermediate level of English language learning and who are fully functional in an English speaking environment, as Singapore university students are, there is no systematic relation between language proficiency and writing competence (Jones, 1982; Jacobs, 1982; Zamel, 1982; Raimes, 1987; Hirose & Sasaki, 1994; Prior, 1995).

To return to the composing behaviours of good and poor writers, studies have revealed a divergence in approach to writing between skilled and less skilled writers. Skilled writers are reported to prioritize higher-level concerns such as thesis, overall intention, and macro-level organization before attending to surface correctness and sentence-level content (Faigley and Witte, 1981; Flower and Hayes, 1981a; Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1987; Bosher, 1998). Unskilled writers, on the other hand, have been found to focus predominantly on mechanics and sentence-level accuracy to the extent of neglecting higher-level considerations such as the purpose of the text and reader needs (Pianko, 1979; Perl, 1979, 1980; Sommers, 1980; Bridwell, 1980; Butler-Nalin, 1984). This difference in approach is reflected in planning and revising behaviours. The planning processes of good writers tend to be driven by global rhetorical goals (audience, writer's purpose, context of task) in contrast to the local sentence-level goals that guide planning in poor writers (Flower and Hayes, 1980, 1981a; Matsuhashi, 1981). With poor writers, planning tends to proceed by free association (Bosher, 1998) or/and a knowledge-telling strategy (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1987). As in planning, in revising good writers attend to discourse-level meaning, development, and structure as well as sentence/word-level accuracy, (Sommers, 1980; Faigley and Witte, 1981; Hayes *et al*, 1987) whereas poor writers focus predominantly on surface features — spelling, grammatical form, word replacement, (Pianko, 1979; Perl, 1979, 1980; Sommers, 1980; Lai, 1985; Hirose and Sasaki, 1994)

The contrasting profiles of good and poor writers suggest that writing competence affects decision-making behaviour during pauses. Finding out the 'what' and 'how' of decision-making that occurs during pauses in the composing process of writers of dissimilar competence levels would further our understanding of why less competent writers write ineffectively and how they can be helped.

Research methodology

Subjects

The 12 subjects, six moderately competent writers (MCWs) and 6 less competent writers (LCWs), were from a class of 24 students of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences of the National University of Singapore who were doing a course designed to improve writing skills after their performance in a qualifying test indicated their need for such a course. (A study of the composing processes of the 24 is reported in Chandrasegaran (1991)). The identification of MCW and LCW was based on scores from three essays each student wrote over the semester (*see Appendix A for a sample topic*). The six MCWs were the students who had the highest average scores in the class for the three essays; the six LCWs were those with the lowest mean scores. The high score writers could only be described as moderately competent as their essays suffered from most of the shortcomings listed in my definition of ineffective writing given earlier (the most competent writers presumably wrote well enough in the qualifying test to be exempted from the course).

The essays were scored holistically by two raters, the researcher and an experienced language teacher at a tertiary institution in Singapore, using a scale (*see Appendix B*) developed from the 'Organization' segment of the 'ESL Composition Profile' of Jacobs, Zinkgraf and others (1981). Inter-rater reliability was estimated at .81 on the Spearman Brown formula.

Data collection methods

A multi-pronged approach to data collection was employed, consisting of video-taping of pen movements at individual writing sessions, observation of writer behaviours, stimulated recall of problems immediately after the writing (Greene & Higgins, 1994), and process-logs. At the individual writing sessions students wrote a short expository/argumentative text while a camera, trained on their writing paper, recorded hand and pen movements. Students were requested not to use correcting fluid but to cancel deleted text with a single line so that revision changes were captured on paper. The writing task was to respond to a letter published in the media (and given to students a fortnight earlier) on an issue of current interest at the time — a proposed law that would make all eligible citizens kidney donors if they had not, before death, registered their objection in writing.

As the student wrote, the researcher-observer made notes of writer behaviours outside the range of the camera and noted the location of pauses longer than 15 seconds. 'At an interview immediately after the writing the student was encouraged to recall the problems and thoughts that occupied the lengthy pauses. Based on Ericsson and Simon's model of verbal reporting (1980), it was expected that problems and decisions deliberated on during extended pauses would be in focal attention and therefore likely to be verbalized and reported. To assist recall, details of external behaviours in the observer's notes were used as cues and probes, following the recommendation of Ericsson and Simon (1980), and the practice of Matsuhashi (1979) and Rose (1984).

Each student's written products (including notes on scribble paper), videotape record, observer's notes, and post-writing interview transcripts were used to construct the student's composing protocol a minute by minute record of the unfolding of the text, showing where the writing proceeded smoothly and where it was laboured. Each student's composing protocol served as the empirical basis from which the student's decisions and composing processes during pauses were inferred.

To discover if MCWs and LCWs differ in pre-writing planning, process log forms were administered at the beginning of three writing classes in the course of a semester. Each time, the topic was given to students a week before to allow time for pre-planning and incubation of ideas. The log form (*reproduced in Appendix C*) contained three questions asking about the writer's overall intention and what ideas the writer had in mind for the essay.

Data analysis

There were two major tasks in data analysis. The first was to analyse the composing protocol to identify decisions and decision-making strategies that occurred during extended pauses. The second was to analyse process log entries to determine degree of specificity of pre-writing plans.

In the analysis of pause content, students' retrospective accounts were checked against evidence offered by the other sources the video recording, the words and changes in the student's script, and the researcher-observer's notes of overt writer behaviours. Thus, a cognitive act inferred from evidence provided by one source was either confirmed by corroborative evidence or disproved by conflicting evidence from another source.

All pauses were coded twice by the researcher to ensure consistency and adequate attention to pauses that gave conflicting indications of cognitive

activity. The second round of coding was carried out without referring to the results of the initial round, and names of students on all written products and composing protocol were replaced by numbers so that the identity and competence level of the student did not influence coding decisions.

Pauses were coded for type of decision making activity and the strategy by which the decision was made, using the following categories derived mainly from Flower and Hayes' (1981b) cognitive model.

Type of decision making operation

Planning main idea	Generating and selecting ideas at super-ordinate level, i.e. topic idea at paragraph level and thesis at whole-text level.
Planning supporting idea	Generating and selecting details that elaborate or clarify main ideas.
Planning rhetorical goal	Making decisions relating to writer's purpose, role and intended speech act; or relating to the reader's identity, expectations, prior knowledge, or attitude to the topic.
Planning organization & development	Making decisions pertaining to sequencing of ideas and construction of arguments and sub-arguments, e.g., deciding what to foreground or what to say first.
Planning language	Generating and selecting words and grammatical structure.
Deciding mechanics	Making selection and monitoring decisions relating to spelling, punctuation, and formal accuracy (e.g., S-V agreement, pluralization).
Revising at discourse-level	Reconsidering, modifying or changing a goal for the whole text or a section of it (e.g., writer's overall purpose, function of a paragraph), or reviewing/changing the organizational structure at macro- or paragraph level.

Revising meaning	Reconsidering, modifying, inserting, or deleting information in a clause or sentence so that its meaning is changed (Faigley & Witte, 1981).
Revising at surface level	Making proofreading changes to spelling, punctuation, and grammar, and performing word substitutions that make no difference to the message (Faigley & Witte, 1981).

Strategy of decision making

The question asked in the identification of decision making strategy was: What consideration was the writer responding to when he or she arrived at the decision? If there was any indication that the writer was considering some aspect of the rhetorical problem (writer's role and purpose; reader's role, needs, expectations; and the context the topic, preceding events, etc.) the strategy was categorized as a *rhetorical* strategy (Flower & Hayes, 1980). If the decision was based only on the consideration that an idea or linguistic item was related to a topic in the question or to some element in the content of the source material provided with the writing assignment, the strategy was described as *topic related*. If the last word or sentence written was read repeatedly to generate the next bit of text through an associative process, the strategy was classified as the *last element* strategy (Flower & Hayes, 1980). If the decision was based exclusively on a previously acquired rule (e.g., don't repeat), a *rule-governed* strategy was identified.

Specificity of pre-writing plans

Log entries were categorized as indicating plans that were 'Specific', 'Vague' or 'Indeterminate' in each of four areas — intention, thesis or focal message, organization and topic content — using a rating scheme modelled on Faigley's 'generality-intention-specificity continuum' (Faigley *et al*, 1985, pp.191-6), based on the assumption that 'greater specificity implies a stronger sense of control over composing' (Faigley *et al*, 1985, p.191). In the area of thesis, for example, pre-writing plans were judged 'specific' if log entries consistently reflected an unambiguous writer position appropriate to the task, 'vague' if entries provided uncertain or ambiguous signals of the writer's intended position, and 'indeterminate' if entries gave no indication of any position.

Findings

A total of 356 pausal decisions were observed in the MCW group and 230 in the LCW group. One explanation for the higher figure in the former group is that, as we shall see later in Table 1, MCWs engaged in more higher level decision-making which, according to Matsuhashi (1981) and Bosher (1998), require longer pause times. Lower level, local decision-making is associated with shorter pause times (Matsuhashi, 1981). There may well have been many pauses in the LCW group which went unrecorded because they were less than 15 seconds long, the cutoff point used in the study to identify extended pauses.

Table 1 Mean frequency of types of pausal decisions across competence groups

Type of Decision	MCW	LCW
Planning		
Language	11	10
Main idea	12	6
Support idea	8	7
Organization/development	3	1
Rhetorical goal	4	1
Mechanics	1	1
Revising		
Surface revision	6	7
Meaning revision	8	4
Discourse-level revision	5	2

To obtain a between group comparison of the kind of decision-activity occupying extended pauses (Objective 1), the mean frequency of each category of decision for each group was computed by dividing the number of observations in the category by the number of students in the group. As Table 1 shows, MCWs made twice the number of higher-level decisions than LCWs in the categories of planning main idea, planning rhetorical goal, planning organization/development, meaning revision, and discourse-level revision. The difference between the two groups suggests that writing competence affects the nature of cognitive activity during long pauses. More competent writers appear to spend more pause time than less competent writers planning and revising at a level beyond the word or sentence, and to pay more attention to the discourse dimension of writing.

The competence groups differed considerably in their use of rhetorical strategies in pausal decision-making as Table 2 shows. When planning main and supporting ideas, organizing, revising meaning and revising at discourse level, MCWs employed rhetorical strategies in 39% of the pauses devoted to these decisions, whereas among the LCWs the figure was 8%. The disparity suggests, with reference to Objective 4, that better writers have greater awareness of the rhetorical situation (e.g., writer purpose, audience effect) when planning and revising during long pauses.

Table 2 Use of rhetorical strategies in ideational planning, organization, and meaning/discoursal revision by competence group

Competence group	Number of decisions using rhetorical strategy	% of total (f)[a]
MCW	84	39% (f = 218)
LCW	9	8% (f = 118)

[a] *'f' is the total frequency of decisions in idea planning, organization, and meaning/discoursal revision in the group.*

With regard to planning, Objective 2 was to discover between-group differences in planning strategies during extended pauses and specificity of pre-writing plans. Pausal planning in main and support ideas, organization, and language/grammar were studied to determine how students arrived at decisions. The results (in Table 3) show that while the two groups appear to use a topic-related strategy to the same extent especially in planning support and organization, they differ markedly in their use of rhetorical and last element strategies.

Table 3 Strategies of planning meaning, organization, and language by competence groups

Type of planning		Last element (%)	Topic-related (%)	Rhetorical (%)	Rule (%)
Strategy					
Main idea	f = 69 (33)	14.5 (21.2)	49.3 (63.6)	33.3 (3.1)	2.9 (12.1)
Support	f = 49 (39)	22.4 (41.0)	42.9 (41.0)	24.5 (7.7)	10.2 (10.3)
Organization	f = 18 (8)	5.6 (25.0)	38.9 (37.5)	44.4 (12.5)	11.1 (25.0)
Language/ grammar	f = 68 (60)	63.2 (66.7)	22.0 (28.3)	7.4 (0.0)	7.4 (5.0)

'f' is the total number of extended pause decisions in the category for each group. Percentage figures are based on 'f'. Figures within brackets denote LCW group.

MCWs used a rhetorical strategy in 33.3% of a total of 69 main idea planning decisions during pauses, compared to 3.1% of a total of 33 such decisions in the LCW group. The striking between-group difference is repeated in planning support (24.5% of decisions using a rhetorical strategy among MCWs compared to 7.7% among LCWs), planning organization (44.4% compared to 12.5%), and planning language (7.4% compared to 0%). The higher frequency of use of rhetorical strategy among MCWs provides further confirmation of a greater awareness of rhetorical considerations in decision-making during extended pauses in this competence group (Objective 4).

In contrast, LCWs seem to rely more heavily on the last element strategy of planning. This was the strategy observed in 41% of the planning support decisions in the LCW group (22.4% for the MCW), 25% of the LCWs' organization decisions (5.6% for MCWs), and 21.2% of their planning main idea decisions (14.5% for MCWs). With respect to Objective 2(a), a major difference between the planning behaviour of the two groups appears to be that MCWs are more likely to refer to some aspect of the rhetorical situation when planning during pauses, while LCWs tend to rely on the last word/ sentence or idea written as a springboard to the next idea.

As for pre-writing plans (Objective 2(b), at least half of the six MCWs had specific pre-writing plans in four areas: thesis, intention, organization, and content, compared to 1 or none of the LCWs (See 'Specific' column in Table 4). Of the six LCWs, five (six in the case of organization plans) had vague or indeterminate plans just before starting to write. Specific plans for discourse level parameters like thesis and organization constitute evidence of the writer's responding to aspects of the rhetorical problem (Flower & Hayes, 1980). The higher incidence of specific pre-writing plans for thesis, intention, and organization in the MCW group therefore reinforces the suggestion (indicated in Tables 2 and 3) of greater rhetorical awareness in this group of student writers.

Table 4 Specificity of pre-writing plans by competence groups

Area	Specific		Vague		Indeterminate	
	MCW	LCW	MCW	LCW	MCW	LCW
Thesis	4	1	2	3	0	2
Intention	3	1	3	2	0	3
Organization	3	0	2	1	1	5
Content	5	1	1	3	0	2

N = 6 in each group

Evidence of greater awareness of the rhetorical dimension of writing in the MCW group surfaces again in the results pertaining to revising strategies. MCWs employed a rhetorical strategy in 71.9% of the discourse-level revisions and 36% of the meaning revisions they made during extended pauses. For LCWs the figures are 8.3% and 11.5% respectively (Table 5). LCWs tended to favour a topic-related strategy in discourse-level revision, e.g., using the ordering of topics in the teacher's question to review the reorganization of information. The study showed 58.4% of their total discourse-level revisions resulted from a topic-related strategy, compared to 9.4% in the MCW group. As in the case of planning, the last element strategy was more frequent among LCWs for meaning revision (53.9%) and discourse-level revision (25%), compared to 34% and 15.6% respectively among MCWs. With reference to Objective 3, the much higher number of discourse-level revising decisions made among MCWs (32 compared to 12 for LCW), together with their more frequent use of a rhetorical strategy point to a real difference in the two groups' revising behaviour during pauses: MCWs tend to review composing decisions at a more global level than LCWs who seem to confine themselves to reviewing at the word/sentence level.

Table 5 Strategies of revising by competence groups

Type of Revision	Last element (%)	Topic related (%)	Rhetorical (%)	Rule (%)
Meaning revision f = 50 (26)	34.0 (53.9)	22.0 (23.1)	36.0 (11.5)	8.0 (11.5)
Discourse-level revision f = 32	(12) 15.6 (25.0)	9.4 (58.4)	71.9 (8.3)	3.1 (8.3)

'f' is the total number of extended pause decisions in the revision category for each group. Percentage figures are based on 'f'. Figures within brackets denote LCW group

Five variables cognitive pausal behaviours that correlated with the students' writing competence scores were selected as dependent variables for a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) to determine which of them were most significant in accounting for the difference between the competence groups. The variables were:

1. Planning main idea
2. Whole-text planning (organization and rhetorical goal referenced planning)
3. Meaning and discourse-level revisions
4. Use of a rhetorical strategy of decision-making
5. Global-level decisions (i.e. decisions resulting from consideration of macro framework or goals pertaining to writer intention, reader expectations, and situational context)

The MANOVA procedure computes univariate Fs which indicate where between-group differences occur. All the variables listed above were found to have significant univariate F's (see Table 6). Use of a rhetorical strategy and frequency of global-level decisions had the largest univariate F's (both significant at the .001 level), followed by whole-text planning (significant at the .01 level). The large F's associated with these variables tell us, with reference to Objective 4, that MCWs differ from LCWs significantly in degree of rhetorical awareness and attention to global parameters during extended pauses. The more frequent reference among MCWs to the rhetorical aspects of the writing task seems to be a factor contributing to better writing.

Table 6 Multivariate analysis of variance with 5 extended pause behaviours

Variable	Univariate F (df = 1/10)	p <
Planning main idea	7.24	.05
Whole-text planning	13.26	.01
Meaning and discourse-level revisions	5.96	.05
Use of rhetorical strategy	29.38	.001
Global-level decisions	24.23	.001

Discussion and implications for teaching

From the findings we may draw comparative profiles of MCW and LCW composing behaviour during extended pauses. MCWs seem to operate more often than LCWs at a global and discourse levels when planning and revising (Table 1). In both planning and revising MCWs refer to an aspect of the rhetorical situation of the writing task more frequently (Tables 2, 3 and 5), attesting to a greater degree of awareness of the rhetorical and global parameters of composing (Table 6). The MCWs' attending to rhetorical considerations (audience, writer role, etc.) is probably why their pre-writing plans for thesis and organization are more specific than those of the LCWs (Table 4). The MCW's initial conception of the writing task probably includes, aside from topic content, some representation of the larger rhetorical context of communicative purpose and reader identity.

The relative lack of rhetorical awareness among LCWs and their marked tendency to be word/sentence focused (Tables 3 and 5) point to two goals that academic writing programmes should aim to achieve. The first is to raise LCWs' awareness of the rhetorical context of any writing assignment so that they see

writing not as a sentence-production, information-telling exercise, but as a speech act involving a felt personal response to a reader who brings to the reading the socio-cultural expectations of her/his discourse community (Bizzell, 1992). The raising of rhetorical awareness might be accomplished through explicit teacher explanations and guided discussion to analyse the rhetorical problem (writer-reader relation, reader's value system, etc.) in actual course work writing assignments.

The second goal of writing development programmes is to teach rhetorical strategies of decision-making by modelling for students the use of high-level rhetorical goals as reference points to guide meaning selection, organization, language choice, and revising. Pre-writing content discussion and peer review activities might incorporate the evaluation of content items against global goals such as the writer's whole-text purpose and intended reader effect, after the teacher has demonstrated, through thinking aloud, the process of rejecting and selecting content based on rhetorical goals.

Conclusion

This paper reported research findings on the cognitive composing behaviours during extended pauses of university student writers of two competency levels moderately competent and less competent. Moderately competent writers were found to make more higher-level decisions such as planning main ideas and revising at discourse level, and to use rhetorical strategies of decision-making more frequently when planning and revising, while less competent writers tended to rely more heavily on the last element strategy. The results suggest that writing skills might be improved through raising student awareness of the rhetorical situation (writer, reader, and their socio-cultural context) encapsulating a writing task, and through teaching students strategies of decision making that employ rhetorical goals as reference points for selection of content, organizational framework and language.

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APPENDIX A

<u>One of three topics for evaluating writing competence</u>

<u>From a news report</u>:

Last month an accountant was beaten unconscious when he stopped to help a van driver who was involved in a traffic accident with a motorist. Mr Sim had got out of his car to offer his help as a witness to a road accident along Bukit Timah Road. He was punched and kicked by the motorist but none of the people passing by stopped to help Mr Sim who was so badly injured that he became blind in one eye. His assailant was jailed for two years. Several people were asked by a reporter how they would have reacted if they had been at the scene of that accident. Here are some of their views:

Homemaker Madam Soh: If a number of people had cooperated they could have stopped the assault on Mr Sim. Alone, no one can do anything. The assailant may be armed.

Secretary Julie Lim: Poor Mr Sim. He was really civic conscious. I don't know whether I would have stopped to help. I don't think I can do much in a situation like this.

Teacher Rose Er: I would get a few people to help. Last year I saw a driver punching another. I stopped my car to intervene and the man stopped.

<u>The assignment</u>:

Should passers-by intervene in a fight at the scene of a road accident? Does Mr Sim's experience show that Singaporeans are lacking in civic consciousness? What do you think? Write a letter 200-300 words long to the press to express your views.

APPENDIX B

Scale for rating writing competence

Level	Criteria
25-22 marks Excellent to very good	Ideas clearly stated and supported with appropriate detail; well-organized with logical sequencing; coherent: cohesion devices bind details/ paragraphs into a unified text; consistent focus.
21-18 marks Good to average	Loosely organized but main ideas stand out in all paragraphs; limited or incomplete support; logical despite a few gaps in sequencing; not always cohesive; some parts not successfully bound to the whole; focus shifts in 1 or 2 paragraphs.
17-11 marks Fair to poor	Inconsistent focus; two more (sub-) arguments unclear, confused or disconnected; lacks logical sequencing & development; serious flaws in cohesion/coherence; one or more paragraphs with no definite main point; extraneous information.
10-5 marks Very poor	Thesis and writer's purpose ambiguous or not retrievable; non-systematic organization; poor development: ideas mentioned but not elaborated or linked to thesis; coherence gaps.

APPENDIX C

Process log

Answer these questions quickly just before you start writing your composition. What you write here will have no bearing on the grading of your composition.

1. What do you intend to do in this assignment? Briefly describe what it is you are going to do.
2. What ideas/points are you going to put into this paper?
3. What is your main point going to be? If you have not decided or are not sure, say so.

Learning English in Hong Kong pre-school centres: A research project

Ng Seok Moi

Introduction

One major review of language education in Hong Kong (Education Commission, 1995), raised a disconcerting issue concerning English language teaching in pre-school centres. Because little research has been carried out on language acquisition of young Hong Kong children, English language teaching at the pre-school level has been and is still the subject of considerable debate. This, however, does not deter English language teaching in almost every Hong Kong pre-school classroom. Thousands of pre-school children exposed to English language lessons are taught mainly through drill activities and rote learning.

This situation exists in English classes at primary level as well, with segmented periods of composition, reading, grammar and spelling/dictation in an examination-oriented curriculum (e.g., Kwo, 1998; Ng, 1995; Tse, 1998). In these classes, the role of children was usually passive, there was a predominance of choral chanting of the target forms; yes/no answers to questions. Written responses consisted mainly of ticking boxes for multiple choice questions (Ng, 1995).

Educators observed that because both teachers and children find English language lessons difficult, many children develop unfavourable attitudes toward the English language. Teachers are well-acquainted with the problems of unmotivated children and many have pointed out that this negative attitude persists in older children in primary schools.

This problematic situation exists even at pre-school level. Because parents are keen to have their children learn English, there is widespread deployment of teachers who lack confidence in the use of English and who have little training in teaching English as a second language (ESL), a difficult task even for those trained in ESL methodology. This finding is in keeping with a study of the training needs of the early childhood teaching work force in Hong Kong

(HKCECES, 1993) which revealed a need for more in-depth teacher training. The Hong Kong Council of Early Childhood Education & Services, a professional voluntary body, attempts to address this situation by providing in-service training in specific instructional methods for these teachers through a Pre-primary English Language Project.

Rationale for the Hong Kong pre-primary English language project

The thrust of education policies in many countries today is toward children becoming literate in not only one but two or even three languages. Many Asian countries including China, Japan, Singapore and Malaysia share the choice of English as an important second language.

The deliberate focus at the pre-school level resulted from a review of Hong Kong literature on language education (Clark, 1994; Education Department, 1989; Johnson, 1995; Tse, 1995; Ng, 1995). One of the many pressing questions of the Hong Kong Working Group on Language Proficiency (Education Commission, 1995) was: 'What curriculum, and what approaches to language in the curriculum, would best help to develop bilingual proficiency in as many students as possible, and at the same time provide all students with a positive experience of education?'

One main recommendation made by the visiting consultant to the Education Commission was that more attention should be focused on the pre-school and primary school levels (Ng, 1995). The arguments presented then were based on educational, economic and social equity grounds:

- Research evidence shows that good quality early education and care for children result in better development; the children are better able to cope with new intellectual demands and are more likely to develop positive attitudes about their own achievement (see for example, Clay, 1991; Imai, Anderson, Wilkinson & Yi, 1992; Juel, 1988; Slavin, 1993; Stanovich, 1986; 1991; Wasik & Slavin, 1993). A carefully conducted study has demonstrated that the positive effects of good reading instruction in kindergarten are evident in high school twelve years later (Hanson & Farrell, 1995).
- Cost benefit analyses from World Bank and other research studies (e.g., Greaney, 1996; Psacharopoulous, 1981; The World Bank, 1995) show that higher dividends are to be derived from a nation's expenditure on the pre-primary and primary levels than on secondary and tertiary education.

- One can also argue on equity grounds that the higher one goes up the educational ladder, the smaller the number who benefit. More attention to early levels of education should bring benefit to more children.

Conceptual basis for teaching techniques

The teaching techniques adopted in the present project are derived from different approaches because all careful language education studies have shown that no approach is so distinctively better in all respects than the others that it should be considered the best method (e.g., Auckerman, 1971; Bond & Dykstra, 1997; Graves & Dykstra, 1997). The model on which this project is based has directed implementation of successful nationwide early primary English language teaching programmes in Singapore and Brunei. (Ng, 1988; 1994a; 1994b). The techniques and teaching principles of those programmes were developed after an extensive literature review by a multi-disciplinary team covering the fields of educational, developmental and cognitive psychology, early childhood development, applied linguistics, children's literature, curriculum development and special education. One important finding from research in language acquisition and child development is that the best programmes for children in both monolingual and bilingual literacy are those that are rich in oral language, those which provide many opportunities for children to speak, and to have stories told and read to them. Songs and games are good supporting activities (see for example Clay, 1992). The facilitative effect of stories on children's first language development is well documented (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott & Wilkinson, 1985; Greaney & Hegarty, 1987; Guthrie & Greaney, 1991; Teale & Sulzby, 1987; Wells, 1987, Whitehurst, Falco, Lonigan, Fischel, DeBaryshe, Valdez-menchaca & Caulfield, 1988). There is also some support in the field for the use of stories in helping children learn a second language (Elley & Mangubhai, 1983; Krashen, 1993; Morrow, 1992; Ng, 1988; 1994a; 1994b; Samway & McKeon, 1993; Yu, 1993).

Of the teaching methods tried out in Singapore and Brunei primary schools, the Shared Book Approach has also been used for pre-school centres in Singapore (Ko, 1989). In classroom application, enlarged books which can be seen, read and enjoyed by the whole class are important to the Shared Book Approach (Holdaway, 1979). Another important principle of the programme is derived from the Language Experience Approach (Ashton-Warner, 1963; Lee & Allen, 1963); curriculum activities are integrated to provide reinforcement and practice of target language. High-interest stories are therefore employed to

provide the starting point for generating enjoyable, meaningful and integrated follow-up language activities.

Phonemic awareness, a metalinguistic skill, has been found to be significantly correlated with success in early reading (Adams, 1990; Bradley & Bryant, 1983; Ball & Blachman, 1991). Therefore, the project also introduces phonemic awareness activities that are different from but related to 'phonics' instruction (i.e. instruction in letter-sound relationships). It seems especially important that Hong Kong children develop an awareness of the differences between the two languages; English in contrast to Chinese is essentially an alphabetic script. Any such instruction however should take place in the context of understanding the text being read (Griffin & Olsen, 1992; Yopp, 1992).

Pre-primary English language project

From March to June 1996, eight teachers trialed a sample package of curriculum materials in four pre-school centres. Feedback from the pilot study was very positive and provided valuable input for a more systematic tryout. The following sections describe the work completed during the main project (September 1996 to December 1997): the development of teaching guidelines, book selection, development of a training programme and the evaluation exercise.

In January 1997, the project was introduced to 12 classes in ten Hong Kong pre-school centres. The demographic data showed that the children came from the target group of average and below average socio-economic levels in Hong Kong.

Curriculum

A priority task in the early stage of implementation was to develop an English language curriculum suitable for Hong Kong children aged 4 to 5 years. Keeping in mind the English language competencies and skills of the local teaching force, teaching techniques were derived from an adapted version of the Shared Book Approach. School personnel were consulted at important stages of curriculum development, in the book selection and in the writing guideline notes for teachers.

A list of topics and themes from the project schools' curricula were used as a basis for book selection. While a limitation of the programme was that none of the selected stories were locally written, the team selected high-interest stories from all over the world in an effort to expose children to different styles

and authors. The team members used their experienced judgement to gauge the suitability of language level.

Development of lesson plans

A simple format for the lesson plans was developed. Nearly all the daily lessons started with a song or rhyme, followed by story reading and follow-up activities that provided further language practice. Project teachers were provided with lesson plans, taped versions of the stories, song sheets and song charts. Following existing practice, English language lessons were conducted for an average of 15 minutes per day.

The lesson plans were developed using several underlying principles, one of which was the facilitation of learning through integration. Integration was achieved through employing similar themes and topics from the Chinese language curriculum and the learning activities were integrated through the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Another basic principle was the introduction of English within meaningful contexts, targeting different levels of language, e.g., the larger units of story and theme, language structures, individual words and sounds of the language. Phonemic awareness activities were introduced toward the end of 1997.

Emphasis was placed on aural-oral skills in the early stages of the English language curriculum, with a gradual introduction to emergent reading and writing skills. The early focus on reading skills seems appropriate since there is evidence to suggest that Hong Kong children may develop relevant perceptual skills faster than other children learning English. For example, the pre-school children in the pilot study scored higher on the letter identification test than their peers in New Zealand (Ng, 1996a).

Teacher development programme

Project implementation strategies included a practical teacher education programme following that of the English language projects in Singapore and Brunei (Ng, 1996b). Through training and practice in the project methods, the teachers gained greater understanding of education principles which had previously only been remote theories confined to lectures and texts, and gained confidence in their own ability to develop teaching skills. The teachers also requested help with classroom English as they had previously used mainly Cantonese in their daily English lessons.

Training workshops

All eight workshops planned for the year had a practical emphasis, with some discussion of the basic principles of the project methodology. The early workshops introduced the teachers to the Shared Book Approach and other components of the project teaching methodology through live demonstrations, video and simulated practice. Each workshop also had a component in which teachers practised the songs, stories and language they would use in the classroom. Towards the latter part of the project year, some teachers started to develop their own teaching activities. The last workshop was devoted to helping teachers develop their own guideline lesson plans, which were later edited and distributed for use in project schools.

The teachers completed a questionnaire after each of the eight workshops to provide constructive criticism and opinions about the effectiveness of the workshops. These questionnaire surveys showed that the workshops were fairly even in quality with the teachers being generally satisfied with the workshops.

Mentoring of teachers

Two experienced teacher educators regularly visited the project classrooms to monitor programme implementation and to provide developmental supervision for the teachers, ensuring on-site help with the project techniques. The number of visits varied according to teacher need and competence, with an average of about 12 visits per teacher.

The main part of these visits comprised classroom observations followed closely by post-observation conferences that encouraged teacher participation and reflection on the classroom lesson. After teacher self-reflection, the advisers would discuss the strengths in the observed lesson and indicate any area that required improvement. Teacher conferences were conducted in a friendly and relaxed atmosphere and usually proceeded in step with the teaching behaviours on focus in the workshops concurrent with the advisory visits. Both teacher advisers used a checklist that guided their observations and project teaching techniques. Discussion typically covered one or more of the following categories:

- techniques specific to the project, e.g., specific steps of the Shared Book Approach laid out in lesson plans, teacher's reading, use of the pointer, etc.
- general teaching points, e.g., appropriate use of questions, ensuring maximum participation from children
- classroom management
- language use, grammar and pronunciation

The summary of the monitoring visits made at the end of the year showed that the project teachers had made progress and reached acceptable levels of implementation in nearly all areas.

Evaluation exercise

Formative evaluation measures like those described in the previous sections are required to provide feedback to project management on the progress of the project, the problems it is facing, and the efficiency with which it is being implemented (Plomp, Huijsman & Kluyfout, 1992). Summative evaluation of this project was secured through an opinion survey and an evaluation of children's English language progress and their attitudes towards learning English.

Evaluating language progress

Tests

Those in the early childhood field are aware that developing or adapting measuring instruments is not an easy task in early childhood, particularly for measuring second language progress. In the attempt to find sensitive instruments for measuring pre-school children's language progress, a wide range of measures were trialed in this project. Reflecting the integrated approach of the language programme, the selected measuring instruments tap the various language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. The selected instruments have been previously used in studies of young children learning English as a first or a second language. The tests are:

1. Letter Identification, testing visual discrimination of 54 variants of the alphabet (Clay, 1993)
2. Writing Vocabulary, in which the children write words that they know (Clay, 1993)
3. Word Test, consisting simple isolated words children read (Clay, 1993)
4. Concepts about Print, a task for finding out what children have learnt about emergent reading, conceptual understanding and metalinguistic knowledge of written language (Clay, 1993)
5. Dictation, in which children write down the sounds they can hear in dictated language, (Clay, 1993)
6. Word Knowledge, testing children's oral productive knowledge of English for common items (Ko & Ho, 1992)
7. Listening Comprehension comprising two components

a) 'Commands' which examines children's ability to follow simple English instructions

b) 'Episodes', a test of listening comprehension (Ko & Ho, 1992)

8. Test of Phonemic Awareness, using words commonly known to Hong Kong pre-school children. (Yopp, 1988)

The above tests were trialed in December 1996. Another instrument was introduced in the two post-test stages in June and December 1997. This involved asking children to read several books unfamiliar to them, with and without help (Reading Tests, Parts A and B). Ongoing classroom observation guided an additional measure in the last test stage that required the child to read a chosen favourite story with and without help from the tester. (Reading Test, Parts C1 and C2). Accuracy counts were taken of the texts read in Reading Tests A, B and C. In December 1997, the children were also interviewed with questions that sought information related to their interests in English lessons. At the same time, eight sets of project and control lessons were video-taped. Limited resources enabled only a crude measure, that of counting the number of English words spoken by the children and the teacher in these lessons.

The sample

Stratified random sampling was employed to obtain a project group of 113 children and a control group of 126 children in the same ten schools. A total of 100 project and control children took part in an additional test in which they read stories. Checks were made to ensure the comparability of these two groups in terms of age (i.e., 4 to 4.5 years), income groups (average to low) and gender. A questionnaire survey found no sampling bias in the demographic characteristics of the two groups with regard to other variables, e.g., the migratory status of the child and the educational levels of the parents. There was only one dropout from the sample at the last test stage. Analyses of the eight measures in the pre-test stage show that the two groups were comparable at the start of 1997. To satisfy experimental conditions and to lessen what is commonly known as the 'Hawthorne effect' (the effect of novelty), the non-project teachers were also asked to attend regular workshops, unrelated to English language teaching.

Administrative procedures

All selected children present on the days the team visited the school were tested in the three stages of testing: pre-tests during December 1996 and January

1997, post-test 1 in June 1997 and post-test 2 in December 1997. Careful training was given to testers to ensure standardized test procedures. To obtain objective measurements, testers were not given details of the project nor told which group a child was from. A tally was taken of the number of children who could not understand English test instructions and used Chinese instead.

The SPSS statistical package for conducting 't' tests for comparing means was used for the bulk of the analyses on the battery of tests. Statistical significance was set at a conventional level of $p<0.05$. For ease of reporting, this report will only describe the results of the analyses comparing mean scores of experimental and control groups at the two post-tests, since the analyses employing gain scores showed similar findings.

Ironically, the main limitation of the study stemmed from the effort to control extraneous variables in having the comparison groups drawn from the same ten schools. The advisers' notes showed that some control children might have some exposure to project activities. Moreover, experimental rigour is a foreign concept to the lay person and some project teachers confessed that they used project techniques in the control classrooms. It is likely that 'contamination' effects such as these may have minimized the observed differences between the two groups under comparison.

Results

Both the project and the control groups showed increases in mean scores for all tests between the test stages, indicating progress over the year. In post-test 1 (*see Table 1*), six months after the start of the programme, most of the mean scores of the project group were already higher than those of the control group. Statistically significant differences were found for one part of the Phonemic Awareness Tests and for a section of the Reading Tests (Table 1). In post-test 2 the mean scores of the project group were higher than those of the control group on every test (Table 2). Statistically significant differences were found for four measures: Word Test, Concepts about Print, Dictation and Listening Comprehension.

The project children generally scored higher than the control children on Reading Tests A, B and C and statistically significant differences were found for Reading Test C where the child was reading a favourite story (Table 3). Statistical differences were also found between the two groups in measures taken from the video transcripts. Almost three times as much English was used in the project classrooms as in the control classrooms.

Analyses of the responses in the interview showed a similar pattern. In comparison to the control group, more project children:

- were able to respond to English instructions
- said they liked their English lessons and liked reading English books
- were able to offer an activity and were more likely to choose literacy type activities, i.e., listening to the teacher read or reading by themselves and other activities such as singing, writing and drawing
- were able to talk to the tester about their favourite story by giving the theme of the story or retelling parts of the story in Chinese or English

Table 1 Means of scores of pre-school children on battery of language tests (May 97 - Jun 97)

Test		Group	N	Max score	Mean	SD	t	Prob >/t/
Letter Identification		Expt.	103	54	42.4757	11.848	0.10	0.922
		Control	109		42.3119	12.312		
Writing Vocabulary		Expt.	103	NA	2.1165	3.252	0.27	0.785
		Control	109	NA	2.2477	3.710		
Word Test		Expt.	106	15	1.3396	2.173	1.59	0.113
		Control	114		0.9649	1.226		
Concepts About Print		Expt.	103	24	8.7087	3.295	0.66	0.511
		Control	109		8.3945	3.639		
Dictation		Expt.	106	37	0.7830	1.650	0.53	0.594
		Control	114		0.6754	1.334		
Word Knowledge		Expt.	106	84	19.6132	11.747	1.59	0.113
		Control	114		17.1667	11.044		
Listening Comprehension		Expt.	103	46	11.0000	5.691	1.56	0.121
		Control	109		9.7982	5.554		
Phonemic Awareness	A)	Expt.	106		10.9434	2.421	2.33	0.021*
		Control	114	20	10.1228	2.769		
	B)	Expt.	106	20	2.0000	3.011	0.66	0.508
		Control	114		2.2807	3.249		
Reading	A)	Expt.	22	100	54.3636	12.0101	F value	0.038*
		Control	23		46.0870	12.8873	4.956	
	B)	Expt.	22	100	16.3182	13.5836	F value	0.743
		Control	23		14.4783	13.5004	0.208	

**Significant at p<0.05*

Table 2 Means of scores of pre-school children on battery of language tests (Dec 97 - Jan 98)

Test	Group	N	Max score	Mean	SD	t	Prob >/t/
Letter Identification	Project	101	54	48.7921	8.014	1.01	0.157
	Control	112		47.5893	9.245		
Writing Vocabulary	Project	101	NA	6.6931	6.9753	0.59	0.277
	Control	112		6.1786	5.6937		
Word Test	Project	104	15	3.1442	3.343	2.59	0.05*
	Control	110		2.1	2.457		
Concepts About Print	Project	101	24	12.0495	3.848	2.03	0.0215*
	Control	112		10.9375	4.105		
Dictation Task	Project	104	37	1.7885	2.545	2.66	0.0045*
	Control	111		1.027	1.468		
Word Knowledge	Project	104	84	28.3173	16.308	1.4	0.081
	Control	111		25.4054	14.078		
Listening Comprehension	Project	101	46	15.099	6.336	2.03	0.022*
	Control	112		13.5268	4.945		
Phonemic Awareness A)	Project	104	20	11.3173	2.578	0.92	0.1785
	Control	111		10.991	2.606		
B)	Project	104	20	2.5	2.866	-0.01	0.4995
	Control	111		2.5045	2.786		

**Significant at p<0.05*

Table 3 Accuracy scores of pre-school children on reading tests (Dec 97 - Jan 98)

Test	Group	N	Max (%)	Mean	SD	t	Prob >/t/
A	Project	54	100	82.378	20.05	0.48	0.317
	Control	50		80.635	16.829		
B	Project	54	100	21.566	13.979	0.5	0.3105
	Control	50		20.208	13.961		
C1	Project	54	100	41.966	34.801	4.49	0.0001*
	Control	50		15.771	24.12		
C2	Project	54	100	57.104	32.135	3.76	0.0001*
	Control	50		33.52	31.81		

**Statistically significant at p < 0.01*

Discussion of the results

On viewing the available evidence the pattern appears clear and consistent — after one year children in the project were progressing better in language abilities. The project children were better in the ability to hear sounds in words (Dictation), at identifying words in isolation without the help of picture clues (Word Test), and in their listening comprehension skills. On a higher level, the project children had a better knowledge of concepts about print, e.g., concepts of letters and words, and an understanding that print tells the story.

The project children in their retellings exhibited better understanding of simple English stories and were better able to read their favourite stories by themselves. (Reading Test, Part C.) While the project children were still unable to read new texts independently, (Reading Test, Part B) their performance on their favourite stories suggested that they were better prepared for that task than the control children were. Preliminary measures taken six months later in a follow-up study suggest that they do indeed have better skills for reading unfamiliar texts.

While most of the differences in means between the control and project children are small, the gains evident over a wide range of language measures must in total indicate a significant educational impact. Not only were children making significant gains as evidenced from the collected data, they were also enjoying their lessons in the process.

Opinion survey

Questionnaires were sent to teachers and principals of the ten project schools in July and December 1997. The views of both groups were generally similar in both surveys and supported the data presented in the preceding section. Additionally, opinion was positive about the different components of the programme: guideline notes for lesson plans were judged to be well organized, clear and understandable and the books and materials used in the programme were considered satisfactory. The teachers claimed that they had to work quite hard in the project and it is to their credit that they have remained enthusiastic about the project. It was also very encouraging to note that nearly all the school personnel reported that the teachers enjoyed project teaching techniques and agreed that they should be adopted as part of the pre-school curriculum.

Indicators of change

The change discussed in the preceding sections is captured more descriptively in reports and notes of project team members. These anecdotal records flesh out to the data collected in the evaluation exercise. For example a teacher in Tsuen Wan was confronted one day by a puzzled parent asking, 'Don't you teach Chinese any more?' Her child had apparently said in English 'I like pizza, please' in reply to his mother's query (in Chinese) of what he would like to eat. The children themselves made interesting comments on their lessons. One four year old was overheard making this comment to her friend a few weeks into the project; 'We really should study more English you know.'

Visitors to project classrooms were surprised to see the changes in teaching methods. The visitors saw children's writing, pictures, labels and charts displayed on the walls, now in English as well as Chinese, and interesting story books on the shelves. Instead of the traditional chanting of the alphabet or the meaningless copying of words, the children were more active, motivated and responsive. Children were often seen to be enjoying a story together with their teacher or being involved in a story-associated activity and learning words and sounds in the context of a story they have read and enjoyed. One teacher adviser reported, 'Not only were the children in the experimental group enchanted with the learning activities, the children in the neighbouring classes were also found humming the same songs or imitating the sounds they hear from the reading of the stories.'

There is strong indication from the study that most Hong Kong pre-school teachers will be able to teach in the approach, thus allaying early fears that these project techniques are beyond the ability of Hong Kong pre-school teachers. The advisers reported that the teachers became reasonably fluent in their use of English in the classroom situation and as a result of this competence they achieved a higher self-esteem. Many teachers were using English confidently in the classroom by the end of the year.

While it can be generally said that all the participating teachers were dedicated and committed to their work, each teacher's progress differed from others, with few finding the change smooth. Space only permits the description of two teacher's responses toward the programme.

Case studies

Many project teachers started with classes that were predominantly teacher-centred and found it difficult to move to a more child-centred perspective.

Miss Ng was such a teacher. In the early stages of the programme, her adviser found her following the guideline lesson notes fairly strictly, even when they were too hard for the children. Time was not given for children to think through the questions and Miss Ng often answered her own questions. Early conferences found Miss Ng fairly defensive, often offering excuses for children's inattentive and non-task behaviours in the classroom. Lessons would often stop abruptly and on the dot.

She also needed help with project techniques. For example, the pointer for focusing the children's attention on print would often mask the words in the Big Book. She often skipped the rereading of favourite stories, missing the opportunity for revisiting language of previously read stories, an especially important provision for most Hong Kong children who would have little opportunity for English language input outside of these classes.

Like nearly all the project teachers, Miss Ng was not confident in using English in the lesson and resorted to using Chinese predominantly for her early lessons. Like most project teachers, Miss Ng was open to suggestions for improvement. Sensitive conferencing and guidance combined with reasonable and achievable targets saw gradual improvement. By the end of the year, she had gained sufficient confidence both in teaching skills and English language to be willing to demonstrate her teaching skills for normal visitors to the pre-school classrooms.

Understandably most teachers felt anxious about advisory visits, but most teachers grew more relaxed with each visit. In rare cases, a teacher would confide to getting stomach cramps when faced with an oncoming observational visit by the adviser. One such teacher, Miss Wong was so nervous that she defiantly requested that the adviser end the first visit quickly since she was not an English teacher and should not be involved in the project. The adviser handled the situation by giving a thorough explanation of the rationale and the workings of the project, plus the benefits that would accrue to the participating children and teachers. The adviser confirmed promises given at the first workshops that the adviser would provide on-call advice and guidance. Improvement would be expected of the teacher but it would be in step with what could be achieved by the teacher and she would not need to compete with other teachers.

After this intensive counselling session, the teacher agreed to give the project techniques a go. Miss Wong's extreme nervous reaction to classroom observation affected her performance and made her appear less competent than she was. It was only after two more visits that the adviser was able to sort

out target areas for improvement: smooth sequencing of Shared Book activities, encouraging children to read with her and effective classroom management skills. She used Chinese most of the time for the first few lessons and also some pronunciation and grammatical errors.

Miss Wong was gently guided through a few points at each visit and great care was taken to emphasize the positive effort made by the teacher. Understandably, Miss Wong required more visits than the average teacher. The adviser was careful to give her individual but unobtrusive attention in workshop sessions. With such guidance, the teacher slowly improved her teaching and language skills and became a staunch advocate of the project methodology.

Attitudes and teaching skills

Educators have pointed out that change may not only involve different teaching techniques and tools but teachers' assumptions about teaching and learning as well. The present project derives from a constructivist rather than a behavioural perspective, whereby children are viewed as active participants in the learning process (Ng, 1996b). Translated into practice, we required our teachers to encourage children to speak up and offer their opinions, to display children's attempts and to see mistakes as part of learning. These innovations often require teachers to provide an experience for learning which is markedly different from their own recollections. Innovative projects which require new management techniques for classroom organization are difficult for Southeast Asian teachers who are often part of systems that are traditionally autocratic in management. Teachers therefore tend to adopt traditional didactic approaches to classroom learning since they have not been nurtured in the liberal humanistic tradition of the West (Ho, 1991).

A different approach to educational innovation may be to change personal theories of teaching (Richards, 1997; Wenden, 1997). Our strategy however, is to work from practice and behaviour to getting the teachers to 'act themselves into a way of thinking' and thus to develop their own perceptions about teaching and learning. This strategy was chosen because of evidence from social psychology that attitude-behaviour relations are not very consistent and attitudes are not always good predictors of behaviour, contrary to popular opinion (Myers, 1988; Weiten, 1995). Attitudes also take a long time to change (see for example, Snyder, 1996). Those who work closely with teachers are aware that progress in teaching skills is not a linear process. Generally, the advisers' reports showed that by the first six months, most teachers were able to carry out the suggestions contained

in the guideline notes and some teachers were even able to develop their own ideas and teaching aids to adapt to the needs of their children. There were also reports of changes in the attitudes of the teachers who were initially apprehensive about the project.

The project planners believe that change is possible when the stress is on collaboration rather than competition. In all dealings with school personnel, the focus was on encouraging as much improvement as possible without unduly stressing the teachers or the school system. Generally it was observed that school support, particularly that of the headmistress, is essential for the process of change. The project was better implemented in schools where the head organized other staff members to help with materials preparation or gave their teachers extra time for project work. Teachers found implementation easier in day-care centres that had more curriculum time, smaller class sizes and more room for books and display. This variable may not be critical because examples of excellent teaching came from both day-care centres and kindergartens.

Recommendations

Educational innovation typically involves a complex challenge, which involves long-term commitment and encounters more failures than successes (Hurst, 1983; Snyder, 1996; Whitehead, 1991). Innovative implementation has been characterized by experts as messy, uncertain and full of unintended consequences (Whitehead, 1991). The implementer has to deal with conflict, compromise and negotiation within a process of mutual adaptation (Bruce, Peyton & Batson, 1993). 'Patience is needed for accepting that what is intended seldom materializes immediately, and understanding is required for working with the stable processes of change at work in districts, schools, and classrooms' (Cuban, 1986). A realistic claim for this project is that a good start has been made to improve teaching of English, an achievement that future work can build on.

Strategies for research and implementation for the Hong Kong project have been taken from the experience of previous countries like Singapore where a similar project has been judged to be 'unique in that it has already led to changes in teaching strategies' (Gopinathan & Neilsen, 1988). This is no mean achievement since most education research has made little impact on the Southeast Asian education scene (Gopinathan & Neilsen, 1988). Hong Kong teacher educators have recently observed that innovative recommendations made by the Education Commission and projects sponsored by the Language

Fund were not taking place in the reality of the classroom. (Tse, 1998).

Future plans are to extend the project techniques to the next age range, 5 to 6 years, and to conduct a two-year longitudinal evaluation of the project. Further research for appropriate measuring instruments will be conducted, adding to the information already acquired. These plans will enable replicated studies with different cohorts to yield more accurate study of the effects of innovative programmes. It would also allow development of better strategies for studying and working with some of the problems encountered in this project. For example, schools will have more time to look into physical organization for establishing reading centres and for facilitating better displays of children's work. Another major issue to be explored is that of tightly controlled curricula in some pre-school centres that hinder proper project implementation.

Another major goal of an extended study could be to explore the process of realizing innovations and to consider the implications for models of educational change, for evaluating the innovation and to examine more closely the role of the teacher in implementing change (Snyder, 1996). There is great scope for an ethnographic study, which could lead to more understanding of the complex issue of educational change.

With adequate resources and attention for further study, important knowledge about children's language learning could be secured for Hong Kong. This project has application not only in English language teaching since its basic educational principles could also be applied to good effect in other areas of the pre-school curriculum. Furthermore, lessons learnt from this project could inform Hong Kong educational administrators about strategies necessary for the success of innovative project implementation in other educational areas at primary, secondary or tertiary levels. These are achievable goals, as is the one that inspired this project. Successful extension of this project's benefits to the local educational system would certainly help to lessen the pressure of an all-pervasive examination curriculum. This could only lead to a better learning environment for young Hong Kong children.

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Promoting second language development and reading habits through an extensive reading scheme

Vivienne Yu Wai Sze

Introduction

This paper describes a territory-wide extensive reading scheme in English implemented at upper primary and junior secondary levels in Hong Kong schools. It describes the local context and discusses the aims and features of the reading scheme, and reports on an exploratory study to evaluate the effectiveness of the scheme.

Background

This section describes the problems in the Hong Kong education system which the reading scheme aims to address. Two phenomena are highlighted: falling standard of English and declining interest in reading.

Falling standard of English

In Hong Kong, a British Colony until June 1997, English is a compulsory subject in the primary and secondary curriculum and proficiency in English has always been a ladder to success. The situation remains unchanged after Hong Kong was reunified with China under the 'one country, two systems' policy. It is generally acknowledged that English proficiency is 'important to maintain Hong Kong's leading position in the financial, commercial and industrial development of China and the Pacific rim.' (*Education Commission Report* No. 6 (ECR6), 1995:1)

However, educators have become increasingly concerned that English standards among students are falling. This is partly attributed to their lack of exposure to English, as the majority of the population are ethnic Chinese, and Cantonese is the dominant language of both home and society (Johnson and Cheung, 1995:1). Even students from English medium schools have little exposure to English because their proficiency in English is so low that teachers have to explain English textbooks using Cantonese. The classroom language

of teachers and students is therefore a hybrid of English and Cantonese. This phenomenon is described as 'mixed-code' (ECR 6:1995) and is believed to be the major reason why many students can neither read nor write effectively in either language.

Many educationists (Johnson 1994, 1996; Lee and Lam 1994; Lam 1996; ECR 6: 1995; Wong 1993) have also pointed out that because the former elitist system (whereby only a proportion of the student population could move on to secondary and tertiary education) was replaced by universal education for all students (Primary One to Secondary Three) and by a massive expansion of tertiary education, there is now a greater range of ability among secondary and tertiary students. Thus, measures need to be taken to ensure students of all abilities can achieve a certain degree of proficiency in English. The Hong Kong Extensive Reading Scheme (HKERS) is one of these language enhancement measures.

Declining interest in reading

Declining interest in reading among children and young people is a worldwide phenomenon, and Hong Kong is no exception. One reason put forward to explain this phenomenon is the proliferation of other forms of leisure activities like television and computer games. A study by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (Elley, 1992), for example, found that family support for reading in Hong Kong was low in general and that television was a powerful attraction enticing children away from books. A large scale study by Storey *et al* (1997) shows that primary students indicate a decline of interest in reading as they progress through school. In the study, a representative sample of 4172 primary students were asked about their interest in reading English leisure books. About 86% of Primary One and Two students surveyed expressed a liking for reading these books, but the percentage dropped drastically to 40.2% at Primary Three, 34.1% at Primary Four, 20.8% at Primary Five and 18.9% at Primary Six.

Why do students show a decline in interest as they grow older? Some educationists suggest that a major cause of this phenomenon is that the reading materials students are exposed to are largely monotonous and uninteresting. Although they have on average eight English lessons per week, the majority of the time is devoted to teaching the coursebook, the content of which is tested in examinations. The short reading passages in these coursebooks are designed to familiarize students with the format and content of examinations and are stylistically uniform and bland. On the other hand, language arts and reading

for leisure are given low priority because these are not tested in examinations. Pierson (1988) explains the problem caused by this lack of variety: '...it is the year-in-year-out presentation of unchallenging and unimaginative reading content... which thwarts many students from becoming absorbed in books similar to the way they are addicted to pop music or video.' (op cit: 347) He therefore urges educationists to engineer an injection of language arts and leisure reading materials into the reading curriculum.

The situation in Hong Kong is complicated by the fact that students are expected to read both Chinese and English books. A recent survey showed that of the 537 young people interviewed, only 19% claimed that they read very often, and the majority preferred reading in Chinese. Moreover, 45% of those surveyed had not read any English books in the past three months, and the mean number of English books read was a mere 2.7 (Young People's Command of Language, 1995).

Rationale for extensive reading

Extensive reading is considered an appropriate measure to address the problems mentioned above. Its rationale will be discussed in this section.

Extensive reading as a measure to improve language development

The input hypothesis (Krashen, 1981; 1982; 1985) provides the theoretical framework for extensive reading and works on the principle that massive exposure to comprehensible language through reading is an effective way to help students improve their English. Krashen (1989: 455) believes that 'large quantities of light, 'low risk' reading, in which students are not held responsible for content, in which they can skip words without fear of missing anything that affects their grade, will result in vocabulary growth and overall language competence.' He states that light reading provides 'a very useful bridge, bringing the student to the point where complex academic texts and classical literature are more comprehensible', and further suggests that 'as people read more, their reading tends to grow in complexity and in range' (Krashen, 1993: 75).

While input hypothesis is necessary, it does not explain the second language acquisition process. Swain (1997), for example, emphasizes the need for 'comprehensible' output to ensure that comprehensible input is effective in producing language improvement. Students cannot learn a language simply

through reading: they need to produce the language as well. In other words, comprehensible input and output are complementary.

Proponents of extensive reading also point out that the use of extensive reading is in line with the 'whole language philosophy' (Goodman, 1986), which suggests that literacy development will be more natural, enjoyable and effective if it is managed through a literature-based programme, with language presented in context and not artificially analysed and predigested. In discussing second language reading, Grabe (1991) advocates a balance between holistic and analytic approaches. He recommends that in addition to the teaching of reading skills and strategies, the language classroom should also include sustained silent reading and extensive reading to 'build vocabulary and structural awareness, develop automaticity, enhance background knowledge, improve comprehension skills and promote confidence and motivation' (op cit: 396). Similar viewpoints are also put forward by Day and Bamford (1998: 16). They point out that extensive reading can play an important role in 'developing the components upon which fluent second language reading depends', and these components include 'a large sight vocabulary, a wide general vocabulary, and knowledge of the target language, the world, and text types.'

Several research studies have also confirmed the positive effects of extensive reading programmes. The most notable projects include the 'Book Flood' Project for 11-12 year olds developed by Elley and Mangubhai (1983) in the Fiji Islands, and the nationwide extensive reading programme for primary students in Singapore (Ng, 1992). In both, the experimental groups outperformed the control groups in English proficiency. However, these are primary programmes, whereas the HKERS is also for junior secondary students, and it remains to be seen whether older children can benefit from reading in the same way as their younger counterparts.

Extensive reading as an innovation to help students develop a habit of reading English books

In extensive reading programmes, students need to read in quantity and, hopefully, will develop a habit of regular reading. This is by no means easy because of the proliferation of other activities and because the school curriculum is very examination-oriented. Although most teachers 'agree that extensive reading is beneficial to their students, many still regard it very much as an 'optional extra' (Yu 1993: 1). It is therefore important to include features that can help make this a success.

Elley and Mangubhai (1983) propose some guidelines for the design of extensive reading programmes based on their Fijian 'Book Flood' experience. These include the provision of a variety of well-illustrated, high-interest storybooks covering a wide range of difficulty, time set aside for reading, encouragement of reading through book display and regular sessions of reading aloud by teachers. The programme for lower primary students in Singapore successfully combined three approaches, namely, the Modified Language Experience approach, the Shared Book approach and the Book Flood approach. A similar programme was also implemented in many schools in Brunei Darussalam (Ng, 1992). Jacobs *et al* (1997) describe numerous reading programmes in second language settings in Southeast Asia. One interesting example is a school-based programme in Brunei which transformed the school from a non-reading culture to an extensive reading culture (Smith, 1997). This transformation came about through the dedication and enthusiasm of a small group of teachers, their willingness to allow students to take books home because extensive reading should not stop at school but 'should be transplanted into the home' (op cit: 35), and through their effort to foster the belief that 'reading for pleasure is a naturally rewarding activity' (op cit: 39). Other programmes include a 'School-wide Reading Campaign' in Colombia, which promotes extensive reading by 'providing time within the regular school day to participate in recreational reading activities' and by involving 'parents and community' (Jurkovac 1997: 45), and two successful programmes (one in Singapore and the other in Cameroon) which, despite huge differences in standards of living, share many common elements such as a system for grading the books, tests to diagnose students' reading levels and regularly scheduled time for uninterrupted sustained silent reading (Tup *et al*, 1997). Similar components are also identified in surveys of best practices in reading programmes in US and UK (e.g., Bearne, 1996; Boucher, 1994; Kletzien, 1996).

The HKERS has included many features discussed above. The next section will be devoted to a description of the scheme.

Main features of Hong Kong learners

The two stages in the scheme are: a programme for junior secondary students (Secondary One -Three, ages 12-15) and one for upper primary students (Primary Five and Six, ages 9 -11). The programmes are implemented in phases, and every year more schools join the scheme. At present about 50% of the secondary

schools and 15% of the primary schools in Hong Kong are participating in the scheme. The special features of the scheme are described in the following.

Features of the scheme

Flooding students with a great variety of books of different levels

Schools are provided with a large number of books, which include different genres and are graded into eight levels of difficulty. On average a class of 40 students is given 100 books to choose from at one time. It is hoped that with such variety students will be able to find books they like.

Integration of the scheme into the curriculum to create a positive reading culture

Schools are expected to include the scheme as part of the English curriculum, with one to two English periods per week devoted to the scheme throughout the academic year. During these periods students are expected to spend most of the time engaged in uninterrupted sustained silent reading (USSR). As Day and Bamford (1998:123) point out, this is a perfectly legitimate activity because 'one learns to read by reading. Reading silently and individually in class is therefore one of the most appropriate activities that could be done in a reading class.' Moreover, the class time enables teachers to monitor and help their students. In addition, students are also encouraged to read at home.

Design of the programme in a self-access mode and provision of materials to support students in their reading

The programme works in a self-access mode, based on the belief that learning will become more effective if we can increase learner independence and responsibility for learning (Sheerin, 1989). The responsibilities that students are expected to assume include reading books of their own choice at their own speed, and checking their comprehension themselves by means of the question and answer cards provided with each book. They also need to decide on when and where they like to read after class, and how many books they want to read in, say, a month. In other words, students are expected to assume the role of an independent learner.

Teacher as monitor and motivator

Teachers running the scheme also experience a change of roles. Instead of being the 'instructor' who dispenses knowledge, they will take on the roles of Monitor

and Motivator. Their tasks in the extensive reading lessons are as follows: As Monitor, the teacher checks students' records and holds regular conferences with individual students to monitor their progress and to share thoughts and ideas about the books read. As Motivator the teacher gives support to students through awards and activities like giving praise, setting reading targets, arousing students' interest by introducing stories and conducting book-sharing sessions, and acting as a role model by reading a book herself.

A change of roles can be difficult for teachers. As Eskey (1995 quoted in Day and Bamford, 1998:47) points out, teachers used to traditional roles like being an 'instructor' may feel the new roles to be 'profoundly anti-pedagogical. Teachers like to teach; they like to feel they are doing something.' Teachers therefore need to be convinced that the new roles are just as important as the traditional ones they are used to. In the scheme, a series of orientation seminars were held to help teachers understand their new roles.

Evaluation

This section reports on the effectiveness of the reading scheme through a study of five schools. The present study will only look at the secondary scheme, but as the two programmes are very similar in nature (except for the age of the students), the research findings from the secondary scheme may also be applicable to the primary scheme. The study aims to address the following questions:

1 Did the extensive reading programme help students acquire a habit of reading extensively in English?
As discussed in Section 2.2, Hong Kong students at the end of their primary schooling have little interest in English leisure books. The study investigates whether participation in the reading scheme in Secondary One and Two can bring about a change in attitude and the development of a reading habit.

2 Did the extensive reading programme help students in their English language development?
As discussed in Section 3.1, improving the English proficiency of students is an important objective of the programme. The study will therefore examine whether the programme can succeed in this and if so, which aspects of English it can help with.

Design of the study

Subjects

There were three groups of subjects: an experimental group who took part in the reading programme, a control group who did not take part in any reading programme, and teachers from five schools taking part in the study.

- ***Experimental group***
  These were 492 Secondary Two students (aged 13 -14) from the five schools. They joined the reading scheme when they were in Secondary One. The schools represented a wide range of student abilities.
- ***Control group***
  These were 490 Secondary Two students of the previous year in the same schools. They were suitable as controls because in the Hong Kong education system, the student intake of a school is very similar every year in terms of academic ability, language proficiency and home background. The intakes' academic ability and language proficiency are similar because allocation of secondary places is centralized: Primary Six students are classified into five bands according to their academic achievements and allocated to a school which accepts students of matching bands. Their home background is also similar because the allocation of secondary school places is also based on catchment areas. Moreover, because the control and experimental students were from the same school, they were taught by the same methods and often by the same teachers. It should also be noted that as discussed earlier, the majority of primary six students do not have a habit of reading in English anyway, so any difference between the two groups can be largely attributed to the fact that the experimental students had a reading programme but the control students did not.
- ***Teachers***
  This group comprised 45 English teachers from the five schools which participated in the programme.

Research instruments

The research instruments were questionnaires. The questionnaires for the experimental and control students were the same and they investigated the subjects' reading habits and English development. The questionnaire for the experimental group included a section which asked subjects to evaluate the effectiveness of the reading programme. The questionnaires were written in

Chinese to ensure that students understood them. The questionnaire for teachers also asked similar questions about the effectiveness of the scheme. The three questionnaires were piloted on a small sample of students and teachers.

Procedure

The control group was administered the questionnaire in June 1993 towards the end of their year in Form Two, and the experimental group was administered the questionnaire one year later in June 1994 when they were in Form Two. Both groups were given 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire. Teachers were given the questionnaire in June 1995, when the reading programme had been in use for three years. This was to ensure that teachers had had at least two or three years' experience running extensive reading classes and could give informed replies to questions about the programme's effectiveness. When comparing the data of the experimental and control groups using T-test, and the responses of the experimental students and teachers using the Normal Theory Test, the level of significance is set at 0.05.

Findings and discussion

Research question one

Did the extensive reading programme help students to acquire a habit of reading extensively in English?

Subjects' pastimes

In both students' questionnaires the subjects were asked to report on activities they liked to do after school and in their spare time by putting in rank order 6 pastimes they were most interested in. Table 1A shows the responses of the control group and Table 1B the responses of the experimental group.

Table 1A Pattern of control students choosing 'Reading English books' as one of six pastimes

Rank order	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative frequency
1	4	4.1	4
2	6	6.2	10
3	13	13.4	23
4	21	21.6	44
5	22	22.7	66
6	29	29.9	95
1-6	# 2	2.1	97

 # Response from students who gave a tick to their favourite pastimes instead of ranking them.

Table 1B Pattern of experimental students choosing 'Reading English books' as one of six pastimes

Rank order	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Frequency
1	3	2.2	3
2	14	10.4	17
3	16	11.9	33
4	21	15.7	54
5	33	24.6	87
6	37	27.6	124
1-6	#10	7.5	134

 # Response from students who gave a tick to their favourite pastimes instead of ranking them.

A total of 97 control students and 134 experimental students included 'Reading in English' as one of their favourite pastimes. This represents 20% of the control population and 27% of the experimental population. Although the difference between the two is statistically significant (p-value = 0.0056), it is obvious that only a minority of the experimental group considered reading in English as one of their favourite pastimes.

Reading patterns

Another set of items asked subjects to report on whether they read English books, the time they spend reading, and the number of books they have read. Table 2 compares the responses of the experimental and the control students.

Table 2 The subjects' own rating of their reading patterns in English

Question	p-value (0.05%)	Mean of control	Mean of Experimental
How often the subject borrows English books (3-pt scale: 1=often, 2=sometimes 3=never)	0.0000 *	2.2623	1.8679
How many hours subject reads English books per week	0.0001*	0.6571	1.9760
Whether subject reads English books during long holidays (Yes=1, No=0)	0.9459	0.5327	0.5305
weekends (Yes=1, No=0)	0.0000*	0.3327	0.4715
outside school hours (Yes=1, No=0)	0.0001*	0.2184	0.3496
No. of books read per week/month	0.0001*	3.7193	2.3041
(1=two or more, 2=one, 3=one-three per month, 4=less than one per month, 5=none)			
No. of books read the past 12 months	0.0000*	5.3027 2	6.2925

*Significant differences are indicated by **

The findings show clearly that the experimental students borrowed English books more often, and on average spent about two hours on reading every week. (The control group only spent about half an hour.) They read at weekends and after school, whereas the controls usually only read during the long holidays. On average they read a book every week, whereas the controls read about a book every month. There is also a significant difference in the number of books they had read in the past 12 months. The experimental students had read 26 books on average compared to 5 books for the controls. Big differences existed between individuals in the experimental group: some had only read a few books whereas a few had read over a hundred books.

Interest in reading

Table 3 shows the influence of the scheme on the experimental students' attitudes to reading. The response most students chose was 'My interest in reading has increased moderately'. On the other hand, about 27% of the students thought the scheme had made no difference and about 4% thought that the scheme had actually made them less interested in reading.

Table 3 Students' response as to whether the scheme had influenced their attitudes to reading in English

Cumulative	Cumulative rating	Percent frequency	Frequency (percent)
My interest in reading has greatly increased	32	6.6	32 (6.6)
My interest in reading has increased moderately	300	61.9	332 (68.5)
The programme has made no difference	132	27.2	464 (95.7)
My interest in reading has decreased	21	4.3	485 (100)

Frequency missing = 7

The three sets of data presented above show some interesting points. Firstly, the majority of the experimental students claimed that the scheme had increased their interest in reading. Moreover, comparison of the reading patterns of the control and experimental groups shows clearly that the experimental group read more often and more regularly. However, it is important to note that only 27% of the experimental students considered 'reading in English' as their favourite pastime. Although this is significantly more than the control group, it is obvious that the majority of the experimental students still had not acquired a reading habit. In other words, the scheme has brought about a change in the

'reading patterns' of most experimental students but not a change in their 'habits'. It is therefore not at all sure whether they will continue reading once they are no longer in the scheme. It appears the majority need a structured programme to sustain their interest in reading.

Research question two

Did the extensive reading programme help students in their English language development?

Reading ability

Table 4 shows the subjects' responses to statements which rated their reading proficiency. More experimental students rated themselves as being able to read independently without help from teachers, but there is no significant difference between experimental and control groups' attitudes towards reading English books ('I am afraid of reading English books'). Moreover, in spite of the fact that both groups were generally positive about reading, over 50% in each group felt there were too many new words in English books, though this problem is significantly more serious for the control than for the experimental students.

Table 4 Percentage of subjects who 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' with the statements

Statements	Control	Experimental	p-value (at 0.05%)
I can read English books independently without much help from the teacher	67.5 (326)	73.7 (359)	0.033*
I am afraid of reading English books	36.6 (176)	33.2 (161)	0.2676
I do not understand English books because there are too many new words	68.0 (328)	54.9 (268)	0.000*

*Significant differences are indicated by **
The base of the percentages is shown in parenthesis by each percentage English proficiency

Both the teachers and the experimental students were asked whether the scheme had helped students to improve their English. The responses show that all the teachers and 89.2% of the students thought so. Both teachers and students were also given a list of English skills and asked to give a tick to the aspects of English they thought the scheme had helped the students with. Table 5 shows their responses in percentages.

Table 5 Percentage of subjects who 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' with the statements

Statements	Control	Experimental	p-value (at 0.05%)
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I am afraid of reading English books	36.6 (176)	33.2 (161)	0.2676
I do not understand English books because there are too many new words	68.0 (328)	54.9 (268)	0.000*

*Significant differences are indicated by **
The base of the percentages is shown in parenthesis by each percentage English proficiency

Table 6 Subjects' perception of which aspects of English the scheme had helped students with

Aspects	Teachers	Students	p-value
Increase in vocabulary	71%	76.8%	0.3876
Reading comprehension	91%	62.6%	0.0001*
Writing	48%	50%	0.8865
Speaking	22%	18.7%	0.5641
Listening	2%	6.9%	0.2226
Grammar	15%	46.3%	0.0001*
Knowledge of the world	68%	44.3%	0.0016*

*Significant differences are indicated by **

With the exception of 'speaking', 'listening' and 'grammar', about 50% or more of both teachers and students thought the scheme had helped in improving aspects of English like vocabulary, reading, writing and knowledge of the world. Moreover, the teachers' and students' ratings for different aspects of English were very similar. The interesting exceptions were 'reading comprehension' and 'knowledge of the world', where teachers felt students had made greater improvement than what the students themselves thought. This is not surprising as many students may not be aware of their improvement in skills that do not demand 'output'. In other words, they may be more aware of the fact that their writing and vocabulary have improved as these are more tangible. On the other hand, the students were more aware of an improvement in 'grammar' than the teachers.

The data indicate that the reading programme did help students develop better reading and English proficiency. The majority of experimental students

were more confident of their ability to read independently and to tackle new words. Both teachers and students also believed that the scheme had helped students develop English skills, especially in vocabulary, reading and writing.

Conclusion

The main aims of the HKERS are to develop in students a reading habit and to improve their language proficiency. The questionnaire findings suggest that these aims have partially been achieved. The significantly different responses of the Control and Experimental groups to questions concerning 'Reading patterns' show clearly that students in the programme are more regular readers. On the other hand, it must be noted that although 68.5% of the experimental students believed that the scheme had increased their interest in reading, the remaining 30% of students did not feel that the scheme had made any difference. It is therefore important to investigate further to find out why it was so. Was it because the books were not interesting? Or was it because these students lacked reading strategies to help them master the skills that would help them enjoy reading?

Another interesting finding is that despite the positive attitude the scheme had fostered in most experimental students towards reading, only 27% of them included 'Reading in English' as a favourite pastime. This may indicate that a reading habit takes a long time to develop, and being in a reading scheme for two years is not sufficient to nurture that habit. The implication is that continual structural support of extensive reading is necessary.

Did the fact that the experimental students did a lot more reading than the control students result in them having better English? A comparison of the questionnaire responses of the experimental and control students shows that the experimental students were more confident of their reading proficiency, though many still had problems tackling new words. The evaluation of the scheme by teachers and students also shows that they perceived the programme as useful in language development. However, these are only perceptions, and need to be verified by other research instruments like reading tests and classroom observation. Further research should therefore be directed to issues like matching students' perceptions of language improvement with their actual performance in vocabulary recognition, reading comprehension and writing, as well as verifying students' reading behaviour through in-depth interviews and classroom observation.

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Use of action research in exploring the use of spoken English in Hong Kong classrooms

Andy Curtis

Introduction: Research rationale

In Hong Kong, as in many parts of Southeast Asia, language standards are a continuing concern. However, Hong Kong is in the unique position of having recently gone through a change of sovereignty. The closeness of the relationship between language and socio-political, cultural and economic factors means that language-related changes are one of the first signs of large-scale change, and the classroom is often where this change is first seen.

Within the general concern for language standards for all three of Hong Kong's languages — Cantonese, English and, more recently, Mandarin or *Putonghua* — is the issue of standards of spoken English. This has become particularly important in recent years, as in 1994/95 the Hong Kong Examinations Authority (HKEA) changed their Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) for English. One main change was to the Oral paper. The paper was originally based on a picture description by the candidate and a solo dialogue read aloud by the candidate, followed by questions from the examiner, i.e., no interaction in English with any party other than the examiner. The HKEA replaced these two tasks with a one-to-one role play between examiner and candidate, and a small group discussion including the examiner and other candidates. The other major change was the doubling of the overall weighting of the Oral paper, from the 8% to 15% of the total score. The main reason for this change relates to the belief of the HKEA that, in the exam-driven teaching and learning of Hong Kong, if change is to be effected in the classroom, it must first occur in the examination. Therefore, if students' ability to speak English are to be improved, the incentive for this must come, at least in part, from exam-oriented rewards (Cheng, 1997 and Cheng, 1998).

These changes mean there is now increased pressure on language teachers to help students develop oral skills in English. However, as the literature review

shows, attempts to do this have met with limited success in Hong Kong. One of the aims of the action research projects in this study was to help teacher-researchers overcome this 'block' by systematically gathering data, which will enable teachers to devise approaches, strategies and tasks to address this long-standing and increasingly pressing concern.

Previous studies of the Hong Kong context

The use of English in second language (ESL) classrooms has long been a concern in Hong Kong, as was highlighted by Chen (1981) nearly 20 years ago:

> I have learned that the actual minutes or hours spent in an English language class may be the only time students really have the opportunity to speak English. In almost all situations students can rely on using Cantonese... Therefore, the English teacher's task should be to encourage the students to open their mouths and practice speaking English in the classroom setting. (p.124)

Another Hong Kong study (Tsui, 1985) confirmed Chen's findings, as Tsui found, for example, that 80% of talking in the classroom was done by the teacher. In another study, Wu (1991) found similar results, with an almost complete absence of student-initiated questions in English language classes.

One of the first large-scale studies was carried out by Lai (1993), whose study involved nearly 500 Form Four students in 11 secondary schools. Lai identified three constraints in the classroom — language anxiety, low self-esteem and inadequate opportunities for meaningful communication (pp. 40, 41).

A more recent study (Tsui, 1996) shows that the use of spoken English in Hong Kong classrooms has not improved markedly over the last 15 or more years. There are many possible reasons for this, and Tsui's (1996) study, based on data collected from 38 secondary school teachers in Hong Kong, identified five areas to explain reticence and anxiety in the ESL classroom:

- students' poor English proficiency
- students' fear of making mistakes and derision
- teachers' intolerance of silence
- uneven allocation of turns
- incomprehensible input

Tsui (1996) states that: 'Getting students to respond in the classroom is a particular problem that most ESL teachers face... The problem... is particularly acute with Asian students, who are generally considered to be more reserved and reticent than their Western counterparts' (p.145).

However, despite nearly twenty years of research in Hong Kong into student anxiety and reticence in the ESL classroom, one critical reason for the limited progress may have been overlooked: the lack of practical, classroom-based research by teachers into what is (or is not) happening in classrooms and why. Another possible reason is that previous attempts to improve this situation may have moved too quickly to possible solutions, without a detailed enough investigation of underlying causes.

For these reasons, Hong Kong makes a particularly challenging context and environment in which to explore language learning issues, with a view to devising practical solutions.

The teachers in this study were asked to give background information on their school. One of their accounts shows the difficulty in tackling the language learning issue.

> There are 47 students in my class. The average age of the students is 16. Their academic result is very poor, especially in English and Mathematics. According to my observation, when I ask them to answer any questions [in English] during the lesson, more than half of the students have no intention to do so. Several are falling asleep. Some are day dreaming and some do not understand what I am asking. Around 10 who are the most active are interested in answering the questions in Chinese. (Mei Ling)

Rationale for use of classroom-based action research

Action research is a well-established approach by which teachers may learn more about what goes on in their classrooms and why. This approach has been widely used for nearly two decades (see, for example, Cohen and Manion, 1980; Kemmis and McTaggart, 1982; Nunan, 1992). As van Lier (1994) points out, action research is based on the belief that: 'the practitioners themselves are often the best people to carry out research on their own practices' (p. 31). Teachers are considered experts in classrooms, and are therefore in the best position to identify areas for improvement and possible ways to bring improvements about.

Despite the promotion of classroom-based, teacher-initiated action research, this kind of research is still relatively rare. Hancock (1997) recently raised the issue asking 'Why are class teachers reluctant to become researchers?' (p. 85). He identifies four possible reasons, based on teachers' professional status, working conditions, confidence and difficulties with research methods, and concludes: 'It seems crucial that teachers' insights into children's learning are

valued, captured in writing and made more widely available than they are at the present time' (p.96).

This research project, then, combines two areas — use of spoken English in ESL classrooms and use of practical, classroom-based action research — both of which have been recognized as not only being important, but also as areas in which much progress has yet to be made.

Research questions

Most definitions of action research require that after the causes of a problem have been identified, solutions be devised, tried out, and the outcomes observed and evaluated. However, this study chooses to focus only on the first part of the process, identification of underlying causes, to avoid the tendency to carry out problem-solving before fully understanding the nature and causes of the problem. This project was designed to address these two research questions:

1. Can teachers in Hong Kong, given the pressures of and constraints within their working environments, successfully engage in practical, classroom-based action research?
2. If so, what can the teachers learn — from themselves, from their students and from their peers — about the underlying causes of the limited use of English in their English lessons?

In relation to question one and Hancock's (1997) study, these action research projects were undertaken by teachers as a requirement of their in-service course; they may not have done so otherwise. Question one therefore relates to their ability to carry out such research, rather than their motivation to do so within the constraints of their everyday teaching.

Research design and procedures

This research project introduced a group of Hong Kong secondary school teachers to an action research approach to find out more about what is happening in their classrooms, in terms of students' limited (or lack of) use of spoken English during English lessons.

A group of twenty secondary school teachers attended a fifteen-hour in-service course arranged over six Saturday mornings (2.5 hours each week). The course was entitled 'Language Systems and the English Syllabus for Secondary Schools' and was organized by the School of Professional and Continuing

Education (SPACE), part of the University of Hong Kong. The course was taught and assessed by the author, and focused mainly on the application the communicative approach in the Hong Kong context, and ways of increasing both language abilities and student motivation through the design and use of, for example, information gap activities and small group work.

The course was assessed according to two criteria: attendance at and contribution to the six course meetings, and an end-of-course assignment. The assignment required them to write a report based on an exploration and investigation of reasons why students were using little or no spoken English during English classes, with a view to devising strategies to promote this type of in-class interaction.

Each teacher was given four weeks at the end of the course to complete and submit their reports. In the course of the assignment, these teachers were encouraged to contact the course conductor if they encountered any difficulties.

The teachers' reports were treated as data in the form of documentary evidence (Duffy, 1991). As Duffy (1991) points out, 'documentary analysis of educational files and records can prove to be an extremely valuable source of data' (Johnson 1984: 23, p. 53). By Duffy's classification, teachers' written reports constitute a source of primary documentary data. In relation to the validity of such reports, Churchill, Williamson and Grady (1997), in their study of teachers' responses to educational change, state that their 'whole study was underpinned by an acceptance that teachers' perceptions constituted reality as far as their work lives were concerned' (p.142). Therefore, despite the possible 'subjectivity' of the teachers' written accounts, their perceptions of their teaching and learning contexts and interactions need to be accepted as an important and valid contribution to our increased understanding.

Collection and analysis of data

The teachers were asked to gather data from four related but distinct sources. They first wrote an account of what they thought were the reasons for the infrequent use of spoken English in ESL classrooms, drawing from and reflecting on their teaching experience.

They were then required to observe and note, but not evaluate, what actually happens in their classrooms during English lessons. They were given guidance on the difference between observations and evaluations through examples such as: 'When in groups, students stopped attempting to speak in

English and reverted to speaking in Cantonese' (observation) versus 'Attempts to get students to speak English in small groups didn't work' (evaluation).

The third part of the process required the teachers to discuss with other teachers, their colleagues and peers, their experiences of the classroom situation, and to find out what their peers thought were the reasons for this. The teachers then did the same with their own students, using whatever language the students felt most comfortable with, i.e., usually spoken Cantonese, if face-to-face, or in written Chinese, if with a questionnaire. Most of the teachers were able to carry out parts three and four. However, some of them reported that, for various reasons, they had little or no contact with their peers, and some reported that their younger learners were 'too shy' to talk with their teachers about the reasons for their in-class English language behaviour, fearing that they might get into trouble or be misunderstood.

The teachers' written reports of their projects form the basis of the qualitative data for this study, together with informal discussions with some teachers during the completion of their assignments, and after their reports had been submitted, read and assessed.

The teachers' written reports were analysed using the simple content analysis method of Krippendorf (1980) (as used, for example, by Bailey, 1992, in her analysis of teachers' open-ended written responses). Each written report was assigned a fictitious name, and relevant extracts from the teachers' reports were collated. The reasons that the teachers gave for their students' not using spoken English in the classroom during their English lessons were coded and categorized, out of which a number of sub-categories emerged. Although a systematic check of the reliability of the classification was not possible, during the informal discussions with the teachers, feedback on the coding and categories was obtained.

Results

The responses of the teachers in this study confirms Tsui's (1996) findings. The five main causes of reticence and anxiety identified by the 38 Hong Kong secondary school teachers in her study were also identified by the 20 teachers here: students' low English proficiency, their fear of making mistakes and lack of self-confidence, teachers' intolerance of silence, uneven allocation of turns and incomprehensible input.

However, in addition to these five main causes, the teachers in this study identified a number of other reasons for the limited use of English in ESL classrooms in Hong Kong, which show that there may be more factors contributing to this, and that the relationship between these factors may be more complex, than indicated in previous studies. These additional factors identified by the teachers can be grouped under three main headings: interactional, environmental and social.

Three parties, three areas and five interaction patterns

The classroom is usually thought of as consisting of two parties: teacher and students. However, the teachers identified three parties involved in the interactions in their classrooms: themselves, the particular student(s) they were communicating with and the other students. This classification is perhaps more significant than it might at first seem, as it highlights the importance of peer pressure, usually, in this case, negative.

The teachers also realized these three parties react in at least three different ways: in knowledge and skills, in behaviour, and in affective factors. This extract from Yili's account of what she observed illustrates a number of points.

> Students usually feel nervous when they have difficulties in expressing ideas and opinions in English. It is quite frequent for them to stammer out the statement word by word. If their classmates giggle at the mistakes they make, they feel upset and embarrassed. The more nervous they get, the more mistakes they make.

As well as giving a good example of the relationship between students' language knowledge and skills, what they do and how they feel, Yili also identifies a 'vicious circle' or vicious cycle' being set up. A lack of confidence or lack of language knowledge leads to the student producing an incorrect response, which then receives a negative response from the other students (or the teacher), which makes the student wish they had not attempted to answer in the first place, so reinforcing their tendency to avoid even trying to use spoken English in future.

The teachers also became aware of the role they play in creating and perpetuating this situation. As Ning put it: 'I think teachers can be the major reason why there is lack of oral interaction in English in the classroom'. Ya gave one reason for this as being because: 'The lesson is too teacher-centred and students have not enough chances to speak'. In relation to teachers' knowledge and skills, in addition to language-related aspects, Qi referred to:

'the quality of teacher training and the availability of qualified teachers providing professionalism in the classroom.'

An interesting example of teachers' feeling was provided by Ming, who wrote that: 'For the teacher, oral interaction in class is very time-consuming. It may cause discipline problems.' The reference to time factors was made by many teachers, but Ming's comment also shows what she feels about using more spoken English in her classes, i.e., that it might lead to discipline-related problems. In this case, the associated feelings appear to be classifiable as negative, but it would be interesting to see what would happen if Ming's feelings about the possible effects of greater use of English by students in her classes were more positive.

The teachers framed some of their observations within the broader context of communication, as well as in relation to language learning and teaching, and identified both intrapersonal and interpersonal communicative factors. Intrapersonal communication, less well-known than, but as important as the interpersonal kind, comes from our communication with ourselves, as we respond and react to what we see ourselves saying and doing. This kind of communication is defined by Barker and Barker (1993) as 'The most basic communication context... which takes place when an individual sends and receives messages internally' (p.18), and they go on to describe it as 'the foundation on which interpersonal communication is based' (p.18). The nature of this kind of communication has implications for aspects of language learning such as learners' self-perception and self-confidence, which are identified by, for example, Tsui (1995, p.87) as being significant factors in language learning. Interpersonal communication occurs when we communicate with others, in this case, students with other students, teachers with other teachers, and student-teacher interactions. This means that at least five interactional pairings are possible, several of which may be occurring at the same time: teacher-self, student-self, teacher-teacher, student-student and teacher-student.

Internal and external environmental factors

Based on their data gathering, the teachers were also able to identify two kinds of environmental factors, those operating within the school system and those outside. One of the language-related internal factors involves schools in which English is the official Medium of Instruction (EMI), but in reality Cantonese is used. As Jin put it: 'The medium of instruction of my school is English but in name only. Cantonese is used in different science and social science subjects....

This practice aggravates the problem of lack of oral interaction.' This comment was made by a number of other teachers, such as Hua, who reported that: 'Although the school they study in is an English medium one, ninety-nine percent of their classes are conducted in Cantonese.'

Other internal environmental factors, such as class size and student : teacher ratios, were also identified by the teachers: 'The size of the normal class is an obstacle. There are over 40 students in one normal class and there are only 40 minutes in each lesson' (Feng). Another example of an internal factor was syllabus requirements, often in relation to time constraints: 'the tight and long syllabus also limits the use of time by teachers for oral interaction... it is not 'economical' to 'waste' time like that. Thus the teacher will usually give up the oral interaction and continue the teaching or lecturing method instead' (Ling).

The main environmental factors outside school identified by the teachers were the lack of opportunity to use English outside of school or the lack of a need to do so, as Chen (1981) (mentioned earlier) described the situation in Hong Kong nearly 20 years ago: 'In almost all other situations, Hong Kong students can rely on using Cantonese'. Compare this, for example, to Bao's comment: 'My F1 [Form One] students feel there is no need to communicate in English in their daily lives. They use Cantonese to talk with their friends, classmates and family'. These two comments are important as they show that, despite all of the many other changes that Hong Kong has experienced over the two decades, these factors appear to have remained almost constant, showing little change.

Social factors

The teachers in this study identified a number of social factors influencing the lack of spoken English in Hong Kong classrooms. These social factors can be grouped under three headings: socio-psychological, socio-economic and socio-political.

Although 'culture' connotes different meanings, 'cultural factors' were identified by some teachers. According to one: 'Apart from peer pressure, self-effacement exerts great influence on the behaviour of my students' (Huang). Tsui's (1996) comments on the problems of getting 'Asian students' to respond in the classroom as they are 'considered more reserved and reticent than their Western counterparts' (p.145), were echoed by Yun: 'There is a fundamental difference between the West and the East. In the western countries, students are more active in class and they are willing to take part

in class activity. As for the students in eastern countries like Hong Kong, they play a passive role'.

What is important here is not, as may be thought, whether these cultural generalizations are 'true' or not, or to what extent they are 'true', as all such generalizations may claim to be true to some extent. What is more important is the fact that, if these teachers believe these statements to be true, then their students may do the same, and behave accordingly, reacting and responding in ways that reinforce the generalizations, in effect making them true.

The association between family background, income and education means that these factors can be grouped together under 'socio-economic' factors. The relationship between these factors and others, such as socio-psychological factors, was highlighted by Hua: 'Their family background affects their [the students'] character. As the majority come from low-educated families, they lack self-confidence'. The same teacher also noted the relationship between family background and another factor; opportunities for practice outside the classroom: 'Furthermore, they can hardly practise their oral English at home even if they want to because... *their family members know little English*. They are not encouraged to speak English at home' [emphasis added]. This finding was supported by another teacher's: 'most of the elderly in the families do not understand English' (Liying).

The more than 150 years of British colonial rule in Hong Kong has, of course, been accompanied by political change. However, the third social factor, socio-political influences, is the most recent one, as it relates to the change of sovereignty, which took place in July 1997. The finding reported by Huang is one example: 'A lot of my students tell me that English will no longer be popular in Hong Kong after 1997'. Again, as emphasized above, what is important is not so much the truth of the statement regarding the post-reunification popularity of English, as the extent to which people believe it, as it is belief that will determine how influential this factor will be.

One effect of the return of Hong Kong to China has been an increase, in some cases a dramatic increase, in the number of children from mainland China attending Hong Kong schools. For example, Fan reported that: '95% of our students are new Chinese immigrants... they have extremely limited English language education if at all from China'. On a smaller scale, Huang explained: 'There are three mainlanders in my class, and they are extremely shy during class discussion... local students are more eager to express themselves openly [in Cantonese]'.

To summarize the teachers' overall conclusions, in addition to the students' low English proficiency, their fear of making mistakes and lack of self-confidence, the teachers' intolerance of silence, uneven turn-allocation and incomprehensible input, the teachers identified three sets of additional factors: interactional, environmental and social. These both extend the findings of previous studies and help to reinterpret earlier findings in a broader communicative context.

Discussion

As well as confirming the findings of Tsui's (1996) study, the findings of this study show that the 'debilitating anxieties' (Kleinmann, 1979; Scovel, 1978), which discourage the use of the target language in the classroom, appear to be still as prevalent as they were when Chen (1981) reported her findings, nearly 20 years ago (Curtis, 1999).

The constraints preventing teachers from becoming action researchers, given by Hancock (1997) — professional status, working conditions, confidence and difficulties with research methods — may well still apply. However, his conclusion, that it is 'crucial that teachers' insights into children's learning are valued, captured in writing and made more widely available than they are at the present time' (p.96) appears, based on the findings of this study, to be equally true.

The answer to the first research question: Can teachers in Hong Kong, given the pressures of and constraints within their working environments, successfully engage in practical, classroom-based action research? appears to be affirmative.

In relation the second question: What can the teachers learn about the underlying causes of limited use of English in their English lessons? the answer seems to be that they can learn a great deal through careful and systematic reflection, observation and enquiry, as Qi's conclusion shows:

> Overall, this project has been worthwhile. Personally it has reminded me of how important a role T[teacher]'s behaviour has in classroom interaction. The project stimulated a questionnaire [given to students] the results of which produced a new strategy which is having a positive effect on oral ability and T/P [teacher/pupil] interaction in the classroom.

Another of the teachers, Yang, wrote the following summary of what he had learned from completing his small-scale action research project:

> As a teacher this project has generally encouraged me to put myself in my students' shoes, to look at oral participation from their point of view... The project has given me clearer insight into why some students do not or do not want to speak out in class by asking me to identify reasons for lack of oral participation and finding adequate strategies to counteract these problems I have also developed my observational skills as a teacher, noting down errors for later use in feedback sessions.

These comments show that it is possible for teachers in Hong Kong, and perhaps elsewhere in Southeast Asia, even with the pressures of and constraints within their working environments, to successfully engage in practical, classroom-based enquiry, including critical reflection on their own practice and the language use of their students. This realization is important, as it leads not only to successful problem solving approaches which benefit both teacher and student, but also empowers both parties through an increased awareness of interaction — action and reaction — in the classroom.

The data gathered by these teachers about their own and each others' classrooms means they are now in a position to devise practical solutions to this ongoing problem of the promotion of spoken English in the classroom. Their solutions are still being tried out, observed, evaluated and modified, so it is too early to assess their outcomes. However, from the teachers' written accounts, as well as follow-up discussions with them, a number of possible solutions to the problem of a lack of use of oral English in their classes are beginning to emerge.

First, although grammar translation and audio-lingual listen-and-repeat approaches can be useful in the early stages, these young learners appeared to have grown weary of such formulaic and repetitive activities, and responded well to more creative and game-like tasks, especially those which involved genuine information gaps and a real need to communicate.

Secondly, as Cheng's (1998) recent Hong Kong study pointed out, such an examination-driven, syllabus-constrained system would need to undergo a major shift in emphasis to create more balance between reading/writing and speaking/listening skills, before significant change can be seen in the classroom. The kinds of relatively minor changes in English language examinations instituted so far would need to give way to more fundamental and widespread systemic change.

Thirdly, the teachers' awareness of the role they themselves might play in limiting the quantity and quality of oral interaction in English in their

classrooms could lead to the development of a course for teachers, for example, on discourse analysis and classroom interaction, which would not only help to raise awareness but also identify ways of increasing student input through modification of teacher behaviour.

As for the learners, it seems clear from this study that more input from the learners, in terms of what language learning task and activities might be most efficient and effective, could greatly assist in the development of more solutions to this particular challenge.

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A study of extensive reading with remedial reading students

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Introduction

The benefits of extensive reading (ER) for both first and second language learners are well-researched and well-known in a wide variety of countries including Asian countries (Anderson, 1996; Coady, 1997; Day & Bamford, 1997; Elley, 1996b; Jacobs, Davis, & Renandya, 1997; Krashen, 1993; McQuillan, 1994; Ng, 1988, 1994a, b, 1995, 1996; Yu, 1993, 1997a, b). However, despite the widely disseminated and strong evidence for the value of ER, implementation has often been infrequent and a less than complete success, especially in poorer countries which suffer from such problems as lack of reading materials, low teacher salaries, and inadequate preparation of teachers to implement ER (Greaney, 1996).

Additional constraints on the implementation of ER exist even in countries with more favourable financial conditions. One of these constraints flows from pressure brought by administrators, students and parents to cover the entire syllabus, to cover every page in the textbook and every exercise in the workbook. This leaves little or no time for ER, which is relegated to the status of 'luxury' or 'optional extra' (Yu, 1993). Examination pressure poses another obstacle to ER implementation, especially when these examinations measure only discrete skills and when such examinations form the only means of assessing student learning and the quality of instruction, neglecting consideration of students' attitudes toward reading or of their ability to deal with large pieces of text.

An even more fundamental impediment to more successful use of ER, one that underpins the obstacles discussed above, lies in the belief that the best way for students to increase their literacy skills and to become lifelong learners focuses on part-to-whole instruction, in which students first master the parts of language, e.g., vocabulary and grammar, via direct instruction in

these parts before putting the parts together to read whole texts. In contrast, the key belief underlying implementation of ER is that students can best learn the parts of a language indirectly by reading whole texts supplemented by some instruction in the parts (Anderson, 1996; Yu, 1993). Research on ER, including some done in second language contexts in the Asia-Pacific region, provides one means of supporting the efficacy of instruction focused on whole texts (Elley, 1996a; Mason & Krashen, 1997), as we would not expect educators to change their views based solely on the abstract logic of the arguments supporting the use of whole texts.

In the present chapter, we report a study designed to examine the effectiveness of an English-language ER programme for remedial students at a public secondary school in the southern Philippines. The population of the Philippines totals approximately 70 million with a per capita annual income of about US$1000. Gonzalez (1997) provides an overview of the education system in the country based on data for the 1994-1995 school year which show a total of 17,538,049 pupils, with 10,903,529 in 35,671 primary schools (which last for six years), 4,762,877 in 6,055 secondary schools (which last for four years), and 1,871,643 studying at 1,181 colleges and universities. These data exclude students in post-secondary non-degree programmes. While 93% of primary school pupils studied in public schools, only 68% of secondary students and 21% of tertiary level students were in public schools. Class sizes normally ranged from 40-60 students per class. Many classrooms were not able to benefit from electronic teaching aids, as only 51% of municipalities were able to provide distributed sources of power, not to mention the cost of such equipment. However, Gonzalez reports that some affluent schools in urban areas were endowed with electronic teaching devices, including computers.

The 1987 Philippines constitution states that Filipino is the national language and that 'for the purposes of communication and instruction, the official languages of the Philippines are Filipino and, until otherwise provided by law, English' (cited in Garcia, 1997: 74). Since 1974, the Philippines has had a bilingual education policy. Currently, students study some subjects such as Mathematics, Science and English — in English and other subjects — Social Studies, Values Education, Technology and Home Economics, and Filipino — in Filipino. Although Filipino is the national language, neither it nor English is the first language of many students. For instance, in central and southern Philippines the major L1 is Cebuano, not Tagalog (the basis for the national language). Thus, such students face two mediums of instruction, neither of

which is their L1 (first language). Next, we present an overview of ER before proceeding to a description of the study.

Drawing on data from studies of Philippines classrooms conducted in the 1980s and 1990s, Gonzalez (1997: 59-61), currently the country's Secretary of Education, offers the following generalizations:

1. No classroom in the Philippines is really monolingual. What happens is continuing code-switching (the local language, Filipino, and English) with bi-medial instruction (the local language and English/Filipino depending on the subject and the language supposed to be used for the subject)
2. The proportion of the teacher-talk to pupil-talk is 7:3, with the teacher doing most of the talking — at all levels
3. Even at the upper levels, the reduced pupil-talk consists of one or two word or phrasal answers to WH-questions... the answers are formulaic and basically fill-in-the-blanks in prefabricated sentences already framed by the teachers' question
4. The pupils seldom ask questions or make comments or requests
5. Using Bloom's taxonomy (Bloom, 1956) of education objectives, questions are of the basic factual information type
6. The best correlate for achievement in all subjects including language is socio-economic level

Bearing in mind that broad generalizations fail miserably in attempting to capture the wide diversity of a country of 7000 islands, here are a few. In the 1960s, literature and language were two separate subjects in the Philippines. Now that they are combined, many teachers no longer push students to read books and stories. Instead, they emphasize the rules of grammar. ER is now sometimes a privilege only of classes of homogeneously grouped fast learners. Otherwise, in the typical class, oral reading may be focused on more than silent reading, and part-to-whole instruction may dominate, with an emphasis on phonics at the lower elementary school level.

Extensive reading: What and why?

Extensive reading can be defined as reading large quantities of material for information or pleasure. In extensive reading, the focus is on the content being read, rather than on language skills. Many names are used to refer to ER programmes, including Book Flood, Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading (USSR), Drop Everything and Read (DEAR), Silent Uninterrupted Reading for Fun (SURF), and Extensive Reading and Information Literacy (ERIL).

Although ER focuses on students reading alone, ER programmes can involve group activities (e.g., Daniels, 1994) which motivate students to read more and provide them an avenue for discussing what they have read. ER programmes are often beneficially combined with explicit forms of instruction, such as intensive reading.

This second type of reading normally involves students reading small amounts of text under a teacher's supervision. Intensive reading focuses mainly on language skills, such as learning specific vocabulary, grammar structures, or reading strategies, rather than on the message of the text. In intensive reading small amounts of text are read as the text is used as a vehicle for teaching language and reading skills, whereas with ER large amounts of text are read. Also, the texts are usually at students' instructional reading level, i.e., they need some help from dictionaries, teachers, or other sources to understand the text, whereas with ER the texts are at students' independent reading level, i.e., while students may not understand every word, they can comprehend the text on their own.

As ER and intensive reading should be combined, school timetables can be set up so that students spend some time reading silently, some time on activities based on the materials they have read during extensive reading, and some time devoted to direct reading instruction. For more details on setting up ER programmes, especially in L2 (second language) classrooms, Day & Bamford (1997) is an excellent book, which can be supplemented by ideas from the authors of the collection edited by Jacobs *et al* (1997).

The following advantages have been proposed for ER (Yu, 1993):

1. Increased knowledge of the world
2. Enhanced language acquisition in such areas as grammar, vocabulary, and text structure
3. Improved reading and writing skills
4. Greater enjoyment of reading
5. Higher possibility of developing a reading habit
6. Opportunities to individualize instruction (Nolasco & Arthur, 1988)

Rationales for these proposed advantages of ER range from the common sense — we learn to X (in this case, read) by doing X (in this case, reading) — to the currently more esoteric — e.g., chaos theory (Larsen-Freeman, 1997) which postulates that dynamic, complex non-linear systems such as human language are self-organizing, given sufficient input and feedback, and reading provides one source of such input and feedback. A more common scholarly

explanation of the benefits of ER argues that the human brain contains innate potential for language learning of both L1 and L2s. This potential is known as language acquisition device or universal grammar (Chomsky, 1965; Cook, 1988). The large quantities of meaningful and comprehensible input provided by ER activate that potential, thereby fostering language acquisition, as learners induce the rules of grammar and other language elements, such as spelling, from the data they receive in their environment (Krashen, 1993). This innate ability enables young children to gain mastery of most of their first language's rules and a good deal of its vocabulary regardless of their socio-economic status and intelligence.

We agree with this nativist view, and feel that the same processes come into play for the learning of second languages. But we also see the possible benefit of what interactionist theorists (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991; Swain, in press) have proposed, i.e., that while comprehensible input is a crucial condition for second language acquisition, it may not be sufficient on its own. Effectiveness of ER may be enhanced by activities in which students talk and write about what they have read or will read. This talking and writing can help make the reading more comprehensible and may provide a means for students to 'infect' each other with the joy of reading. Talking and writing also moves students from the receptive language competence needed for reading to the more demanding productive competence required for speaking and writing. Additionally, interactionists learners can benefit from a small amount of explicit language instruction in the overall context of an instructional programme featuring large quantities of comprehensible input by such means as ER.

Extensive reading: How?

Experts on ER (e.g., Yu, 1993) suggest the following characteristics for successful programmes:

1. A large selection of reading materials to suit various reading levels and interests
2. Time set aside for students to read during school
3. Teachers who:
   a) read silently along with students and share about what they read
   b) read aloud to students
   c) teach reading skills
   d) ask students to share with their classmates about their reading and
   e) monitor students' ER progress

4. Engaging post-reading tasks, ones which do not take away from the joy of read and that do some or all of the following:
   a) allow students to 'advertise' to peers the texts they have enjoyed
   b) help teachers and students check students' progress
   c) provide students with some check and demonstrate their understanding,
   d) encourage students to apply and develop their understanding of concepts and issues addressed in their reading in a variety of ways, including via art, music, and drama

From our observations and that of colleagues in Asian countries, we feel that good has resulted from ER. Examples can be gleaned from the collection edited by Jacobs, Davis, and Renandya (1997), containing chapters describing successful ER programmes in Southeast Asia and other places around the world. For instance, Lie (1997) describes ER among Indonesian university students, Smith (1997) explores the establishment of an ER programme in a Brunei secondary school, and Cockburn, Isbister, and Sim-Goh (1997) explain a buddy reading programme in Singapore in which older primary school students promote reading among schoolmates from lower grades.

However, a gap often exists between theory and implementation (Rodriguez-Trujillo, 1996). Despite the success stories mentioned in the preceding paragraph, sustained, well-run programmes are more often the exception. Effective ER programmes seem especially scarce for lower achieving students, as many educators are of the view that such students lack the desire or skills to read extensively. Further research is needed to develop and test situation-appropriate ER implementation with lower-achieving students. We now state the research questions used in the present study, one which investigated an attempt to engage a group of these lower-achieving pupils in ER. Then, the methodology used in the study will be described.

Research questions

1. Will there be a significant difference in the pre-test reading proficiency scores of the control group (students who do not participate in an ER programme) and the experimental group (students who do participate in an ER programme)?
2. Will there be a significant difference in the post-test reading proficiency scores of the control and experimental groups?

The second question was the one of interest. The first one was set in order to test whether the randomization procedures used before the study began had

succeeded in yielding control and experimental groups that were indeed matched as to initial reading proficiency.

Method

Participants

Students at a public secondary school on the island of Mindanao in the southern Philippines participated in the study. The two-storey school boasts clean, beautiful grounds and has received an award for being the most effective secondary school in Region X. However, the school lacks a gymnasium and AV room, and the library is housed in a dilapidated building. School enrolment stood at more than 2800 for the 1997-1998 academic year, with an average of 52 students per class.

Ninety percent of the students at this school come from low-income homes where reading materials tend to be scarce. Many of them do not live with their own families. Instead, they live with other families who pay for their schooling in return for work around the house and elsewhere. Indeed, some students even support their families by working at night. For instance, they might sell 'balut', eggs that are about to hatch. Thus, many have little time or energy after school for academic tasks, and without an in-class ER programme they are likely to do little reading.

Most classes last 40 minutes except for Science and for Technology and Home Economics which last 80 minutes. In addition to a bulletin board, every classroom is enlivened by various corners. The Filipiniana corner features displays on Philippines heroes, tourist spots, and folk dances. Other corners focus on science and on drug prevention. Drug abuse is a problem among a small number of students including some who participated in the study.

The study was conducted over a period of six months from September 1996 to January 1997. In September, 60 first-year students at the school, 30 females and 30 males, who were to be assigned to remedial reading classes constituted the participants in this study. Their ages ranged from 12-18. Using a matched-pairs design, each student was first matched with another of similar IQ, sex, socio-economic status, reading level, and past achievement. Then, one member of each pair was randomly assigned to the experimental remedial reading class, and the other member was assigned to the control class, so as to achieve balance on the variables in the two remedial reading classes.

Procedure

A pre-test - post-test Control Group design was used. The dependent variable, reading proficiency, was assessed via two instruments: the Informal Reading Inventory (IRI) (Johnson, Kress, & Pikulski, 1987), which yields scores from 0-100 on reading comprehension, and the Gray Standardized Oral Reading Test (GSORT) (Gray, 1967), which measures reading speed and accuracy, and indicates the grade level at which the student is reading. These instruments had been used previously by local researchers in the same area of Philippines and were found to be useful. Both instruments were administered twice, once two months before the treatment began and again after the treatment had been carried out. The pre-test was administered by the first author with assistance from other teachers at the school, while the post-test was administered by other teachers, in an effort to lessen experimenter bias.

The treatment lasted six months. During that period, both the control and experimental groups received 40 minutes of regular English class daily, plus an additional 40 minute remedial reading class. The first author conducted both remedial classes, whereas two different teachers taught the regular English classes. The school had no ER programme, and it is not common for teachers to have initiated their own. The regular English class followed the same syllabus for both groups, while the remedial reading class varied.

A typical reading class period — to the extent that there is a typical reading class period — at the school in which the present study was conducted begins, like all classes, with a prayer, followed by the class and teacher exchanging greetings. The teacher then asks students to open their textbooks to a given page. Next, the teacher might introduce the topic of the reading text and/or ask students to skim or scan the reading passage. The teacher then reads aloud the text, unlocking difficult vocabulary and grammar points. Next, students are asked to answer questions to check their comprehension. This involves silent reading of at least parts of the passage. An integrated skills approach is used, so that in any given lesson in the textbook (it takes several classes to cover one textbook lesson) students are listening, speaking, reading, writing, and studying grammar.

In their remedial reading class, the control group were taught the conventional way from a textbook which included lessons on vowel and consonant sounds, minimal pairs, reading and reciting poems, and reading short selections. The only silent reading the control group did — and this infrequently — was of these short selections from their textbook.

In contrast, the experimental remedial reading group took part in an ER programme. The core of the ER programme consisted of students reading texts of their choice and then doing a variety of post-reading activities. The female students tended to choose fiction, whereas the males often preferred non-fiction, such as news and feature articles from magazines. Care was taken that students chose books that were at their independent reading level. Obtaining materials took a good deal of effort and time, but a barely sufficient collection was assembled from students themselves, fellow teachers, the school library, and donations of money or materials from the community (Lituanas, 1997). [One method that was not employed was for teachers (Guadart, 1994) and students (Davidson, Ogle, Ross, Tuhaka, & Ng, 1997) to write ER materials.]

In the experimental group's remedial class, students spent about 45% of the time doing silent reading (about 20 minutes per lesson), with another 45% spent on pre- and post-reading activities (mostly post-reading) which included attention to students' problems in reading. The remaining 10% of class time was spent on classroom management, including disciplining unruly students.

The teacher used various techniques to encourage students to read more and to increase their reading skills, such as:

- reading aloud by the teacher
- asking students to predict what a story was about using such clues as the title, cover and illustrations
- giving brief summaries/reviews of materials she had read and enjoyed
- asking students to summarize for the entire class material they had read and enjoyed
- chatting with students about what they were reading or had read
- monitoring students' progress in ER and involving them in such monitoring

While students were reading silently, the teacher would:

- read on her own (10%)
- assist students to select reading material (10%)
- help students, e.g., by answering questions and by sitting beside students who had difficulty recognizing words and guiding them (80%)

Ideally, the teacher would have spent a much larger percentage of the time reading on her own as a model for students. However, given the difficulty of obtaining ER materials suitable to students' interest and reading levels, it seemed more important to spend time on the two other activities.

Post-reading activities included:

- answering higher-order thinking questions, as part of a game called 'Book Wheels' (Jacobs, 1993)
- role play
- retelling
- mock interviews in which one student portrayed a character in the story that other students would then interview
- adding new words encountered while reading to a personalized vocabulary notebook (Kweldju, 1997)

These post-reading activities provided a means of attracting less-diligent students to ER, because they enjoyed the stories related by classmates who had done the reading and follow-up tasks. Nevertheless, the participation of these few less-diligent students remained unsatisfactory. Table 1 provides an overview of how ER was implemented with the experimental group.

Table 1 Guidelines for ER programmes and how they were implemented in the current study

ER Programme guidelines	Implementation
1. Large selection of materials for various reading levels and interests	Materials were obtained by the students and teacher from a variety of sources
2. Time set aside for students to read during school	45% of class time was reserved for silent reading, and pre- and post-reading was designed to encourage students to also read at home
3. Teachers who encourage students to read	The teacher read silently while student read and talked about what she read, read aloud and had students predict what would happen next, asked students to share with classmates about what they read, and students and teachers monitored student progress
4. Engaging post-reading tasks	Games, role play, retelling, mock interviews, vocabulary notebooks were used

Data analysis

T-tests were used to compare the pre-test scores of the control and experimental groups on the GSORT and the IRI to establish if they were indeed roughly equivalent on the dependent variable as it was operationalized in this study, i.e., the two measures of reading proficiency, before the study began. T-tests were used again to compare the post-test scores of the two groups on the two

instruments to see if the treatment might have been associated with any difference in reading proficiency. A familywise alpha level of .05 was set for all t-tests. With degrees of freedom of 29, the critical value was approximately 2.67. This higher than normal critical value for a .05 alpha level (compared to the normal 2.04) was used to compensate for the fact that four t-tests were done.

Results

Table 2 shows the pre-test results on both measures of reading proficiency. The t-tests suggest, in answer to the first research question, that there were no significant differences between the control and experimental groups prior to the inception of the six-month experimental period.

Table 3 shows the post-test results on both measures of reading proficiency. The mean post-test IRI score for the control group was 12.28 compared to 32.57 for the experimental group. On the GSORT, mean score for the control group was 3.96 compared to 5.25 for students in the ER group. As mentioned in the Procedure section, GSORT is an indicator of the grade level at which the student is reading. Since students in our study were in Grade 7, they should have scored at least 7 on the GSORT. However, as Table 2 indicates, the ER students were still reading at 5.25 level, somewhat below their expected level.

Table 2 T-tests comparing control and experimental groups on pre-tests of reading proficiency

Proficiency test	n	Mean	s.d.	t	IRI
Control	30	7.89	4.81	0.20	(n.s.)
Experimental	30	7.61	5.19		
GSORT					
Control	30	2.55	0.73	0.86	(n.s.)
Experimental	30	2.38	0.83		

n.s. = nonsignificant

Table 3 T-tests comparing control and experimental groups on post-tests of reading proficiency

Proficiency test	n	Mean	s.d.	t	IRI
Control	30	12.28	5.77	6.72*	
Experimental	30	32.57	14.80		
GSORT					
Control	30	3.96	0.88	5.31*	
Experimental	30	5.25	1.16		

** Significant at $p < .05$*

The t-tests suggest, in answer to the second research question, that after the six-montn experiment, significant differences existed between the control and experimental groups in terms of reading proficiency. As a follow-up statistical procedure to measure the amount of variance in scores on the two reading tests accounted for by the independent variable (whether students were in the control or experimental group), eta squared tests were run. Results showed that the experimental treatment accounted for 61% of the variance in IRI scores and 49% of the variance in GSORT scores, an average of 55%, a very strong association (Hatch & Lazaraton, 1991).

Discussion

The results of the current study suggest that a well-conducted ER programme may be able to make a significant impact on reading proficiency, even when students are of below average level and where reading materials are scarce. However, it should be noted that despite their impressive gains, students in the experimental group were still reading below grade level, as indicated by their GSORT scores). Perhaps, continued extensive reading would be necessary for overcoming this deficit. From a research perspective, the two groups would, ideally, have continued the control and experimental treatments for a longer period to see if the effect remained and if the experimental group continued their progress. Also, the research design would have been improved had follow-up been done to investigate whether the ER programme was associated with more out-of-class reading by students after the programme had ended. Constraints on the first author's time, unfortunately, did not permit this. However, the first author continues to use ER and to inform other teachers about it, both at her school and elsewhere.

The relative success of ER with remedial students may have important implications. Early lack of success in reading often leads to failure in other academic areas, low academic self-image, low motivation to study, high likelihood of dropping out of school, high delinquency rates, and poor career prospects after leaving school (Goodlad, 1983). Further, instruction for such students may sometimes be of lower quality, focusing on drills and other lower-order thinking tasks, as teachers may have inappropriately low expectations for what these students can achieve (Oakes, 1985).

Many intervention programmes have been implemented to meet the needs of such low achieving students. Successful programmes focus on early and intensive intervention, and use well-researched pedagogy (e.g., Clay, 1996;

Slavin, Madden, Karweit, Dolan, & Wasik, 1992). However, unlike the early intervention programmes referenced in the preceding sentence which are typically used with lower primary school students, the programme described in this chapter was carried out with secondary school students. These students may be more difficult to reach as they have experienced years of reading failure.

ER, for the many reasons reviewed in the introduction to this chapter, certainly appears to belong in intervention programmes for students with reading difficulties. In the present study, we saw a significantly greater improvement in proficiency for those students who participated in the ER programme implemented by the first author. This programme, we would like to stress, followed the guidelines for effective ER mentioned earlier in this chapter. How this was done was displayed in Table 1 in the Procedures section above.

Teachers will often need support to implement ER, support in the form of teacher development workshops and follow-up coaching, time for teachers to assist each other on ER implementation, administrative backing for devoting time to silent reading, funds to purchase reading materials for class and school libraries, and help from students' homes to encourage them to make reading a habit. Lack of such support is a key reason why, despite the apparent success of an ER programme with one group of students at their school, many other teachers at the school where the present study was conducted have remained reluctant to initiate ER with their students.

In conclusion, students who are not currently skilled, enthusiastic readers face unnecessary and serious obstacles to realizing potential contributions to themselves, their families and to society. In this information age, they will be shut off from the power gained through obtaining and providing information and from the benefits and inspiration of good fiction. Thus, educators need to create and implement programmes to help students who fall behind in reading. The accumulated wisdom embodied in the current study and the many which came before it strongly suggests that ER can play an important role in helping students gain in their level of reading skill. Reading skills and the benefits that flow from them are essential if students are to become people who, to paraphrase Friere (1970), use the word to know and change the world.

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Second language writers' knowledge and perceptions about writing and learning to write strategies

Kwah Poh Foong

Introduction

Studies in second language learning strategies have suggested that learners have knowledge and perceptions about what and how they learn (Nisbet & Shucksmith, 1986; Horwitz, 1987; Wenden, 1991, 1997). Similarly, second language writers could bring to the class their knowledge, beliefs and assumptions of writing and learning to write strategies that could influence how they view writing and what they perceive to be the best approach for learning to write. These preconceived ideas could be influenced by their purpose for learning and previous writing and learning experiences. Differences between the assumptions and expectations of the teacher and students could result in negative learning experiences and attitudes toward some learning tasks and undermine the teaching and learning approach that the teacher uses in the classroom. Therefore, it is important for the teacher to be aware of the implicit knowledge and perceptions that learners have. Students' perspectives about writing and learning to write have to be respected and given due consideration when developing teaching strategies so as create a positive learning environment for both the teacher and students.

This paper reports an exploratory classroom-based research to gain some insights into Chinese ESL writers' knowledge and perceptions of writing and learning to write strategies.

Research questions

This study attempts to answer these three research questions:

1. What learning and writing experiences did students from the Republic of China (PRC) have?
2. What can these students tell us about their knowledge and perceptions about writing?

3. What do they think are the best learning to write strategies which help them improve their writing abilities?

Research on ESL writing

Research on second language writing has focused on two main areas — the study of composing processes and the influence of first language (L1) on second language (L2) writing. Following the cognitive theory in L1 writing (Flower and Hayes, 1981), research on second language writing began to investigate the composing strategies through protocol analysis (for a good review, refer to Krapels, 1990). Research on the influences of L1 discourse features on L2 writing could be traced back to Kaplan's (1966) work on contrastive rhetoric. At present, numerous studies have analysed written texts to examine the rhetorical patterns of Chinese essays and how these have influenced the organizational structures of student writing (for a good review, refer to Connors, 1996). Studies have also been conducted on the influences of L1 composing strategies on L2 writing (Freidlander, 1990; Wong, 1994).

Compared to the research done on cognitive strategies of writing and contrastive rhetoric, little work has been done on second language writing which investigates the knowledge and perceptions about writing from the students' perspectives. One such study was conducted by Silva (1992), who examined ESL graduate students' perceptions of the differences between L1 and L2 writing and how these differences should be considered in teaching ESL writing. This study suggested that student writers bring 'some fairly strongly held and well-developed ideas about writing and writing instruction to class with them' (p.43).

Another study conducted by Railey, Devine & Boshoff (1992) investigated one dimension of metacognition, the knowledge of cognition, in L1 and L2 writing. They found that L1 and L2 writers had different metacognitive models of writing which could have an effect on their writing performance. The results showed that L2 writers had complex models but their concerns for grammar and correctness seemed to conflict with other demands of writing and worked against their writing performance.

In view of the small amount of research on students' knowledge and perceptions of writing and learning to write, the study reported here is an attempt to examine these from the students' perspectives by analysing their written descriptions of their own writing process and learning experiences.

While the subjects of Silva's (1992) study were ESL learners from different language backgrounds, this study focused on PRC Chinese learners of English.

The study

Participants

The participants in this study were 20 students from the People's Republic of China between the ages of 18 - 19 and included 6 females and 14 males. They had all studied English for six years in China and passed the National College Entrance Examination in China. They were enrolled in a six-month intensive English programme at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. This programme aims to help these students communicate confidently and effectively for everyday purposes and develop communication and learning skills needed for academic purposes.

Context of the study

The six-month intensive English programme consists of these courses: Integrated Communication Skills, Academic Oral Communication/Listening & Speaking, Academic Reading Comprehension and Academic Writing Skills. The aim of the Academic Writing Skills course is to develop their general writing ability and to prepare them to write for academic purposes. In this course, writing was taught as a process where students went through pre-writing, drafting, reviewing, revising and editing. Therefore, the teaching approach adopted is based on the cognitive model of writing instruction, influenced by L1 writing research done in different contexts and classrooms. Even though similar research has been conducted in L2 with similar results, one sometimes wonders to what extent this model is applicable to the context of one's own classroom that could be different from a classroom in another social context. The classroom is a social entity with both the teacher and the students as interactive participants who may have different views about writing and learning. Therefore, it is necessary for a teacher to conduct research in their own classes to understand students' views and expectations so as to make informed choices for their classroom practices. Such insights are valuable in developing teaching practices that attempt to accommodate the expectations of the teacher and the students. This study is an attempt by the researcher-cum-teacher to understand her students to help her make the appropriate learning choices for her classroom teaching.

Data collection and analysis

Two instruments were used to collect the data which were administered during the first two weeks of the programme. The first instrument was in the form of an in-class essay prompt to elicit students' prior writing and learning experiences, writing problems and attitudes towards writing.

1. Your writing teacher is interested in helping you to improve your writing skills. To help the teacher understand you better, write an essay describing your classroom writing experiences. You can tell your teacher how writing was taught in high (middle) school, the kinds of essays you wrote, the problems that you have in writing, and any other information that you think will be useful to your teacher. In describing your experiences, please be as specific as you can by giving clear examples.

The second instrument was a semi-structured questionnaire to explore students' knowledge of the writing process and their learning to write strategies.

2. Your teacher is interested in knowing how you write and how you improve your writing. Please answer the following questions about your writing process and learning strategies.

a) What did you do or concentrate on when you wrote an essay?
   - Before you started writing
   - While you were writing
   - When you had finished writing

b) What do you need to do to improve your own writing?

In analysing the students' essays, their descriptions of previous learning and writing experiences were guided by the prompts given in the instrument. Most of their descriptions focused on what and how they learn and the purpose of writing English compositions. Students' perceptions about their writing were expressed when they wrote about the problems they faced in writing. In analysing the responses to the semi-structured questionnaire, students' descriptions on their use of writing strategies were categorized according to the three main components used to describe the writing process in the cognitive model of writing developed by Hayes and Flowers (1981). The components were planning, writing, and reviewing. Finally, students' knowledge and perceptions about learning to write strategies were based on what thought would be effective ways to help them improve their writing abilities. The strategies noted were reported by the students in their responses.

Results and discussion

Students' writing and learning experiences

Students' responses to the essay prompt that elicited their writing and learning experiences in high school indicated great emphasis on correctness and learning of grammar and vocabulary. These descriptions were reflected in their essays.

Emphasis on correctness

> The teacher told us to write the composition with easy words and easy sentences. So that we could make less mistakes... Next day, we handed in our homework and the teacher pointed out the mistake. (S18)

Learning of grammar and vocabulary

> In middle school we studied the grammar most time. (S3)
>
> First, I just know words. The teacher required us to make sentences with these words. After two years we were required to join some sentences up. It was called composition. (S14)

The purpose of teaching and learning to write in their high school English class was to provide practice for the National College Entrance Exam (NCEE), in which they were expected to write short essays with a high degree of accuracy as described by two students.

> In the examination we must write an article about 200 words. (S3)
>
> In high middle school, I had done a lot of classroom writing experiences for the College Entrance Exam. (S8)

As such, the types of writing that these Chinese students wrote in their English classes were mostly short descriptive essays and guided compositions, the kinds of compositions that were tested in the NCEE. The compositions were mostly written in class as a form of practice for the college examination.

> In senior school, the teachers only want us to write simple things, for example, describing an object we oten used, [writing] a letter to an American friend, a note and so on. In these essays, only 100-200 words are used. (S1)
>
> In high school I wrote some short compositions, such as letters, notices, stories and so on. Most of them were only one hundred words long. (S5)

Another common writing task required students to translate from Chinese to English as a means to help them express themselves better. This could be influenced by the grammar-translation method, a common approach used for teaching English in China.

> Teacher had always told us that we could translate Chinese into English, then connected them with words. (S4)
>
> Many of the experiences are looked as translating: I was given some information in Chinese, then I wrote down in English. (S8)

It is also apparent that the students learned by following models and examples. Analyzing model essays was a way of teaching writing style and organization. Some students described the following writing practices.

> First, my teacher tell me to read a lot. We should study many essays by famous writer. The teacher explains how an article is organized, how to decide the style. He explains very carefully from one part to another, from one sentence to another. Then he tells us to write ourselves. But we can't write freely, we should follow the example — the essay we have learned. so what we write are very alike. The style, the organization of sentences are all like the article. We almost copy the essay. (S19)

In sum, the students' descriptions of their previous learning experiences have indicated that the focus of writing had been language- and product-based. The purpose of teaching and learning to write was to pass the examination to qualify for entrance into the college or university. That is why there was so much emphasis on accuracy and correctness. This could account for the kinds of short essays they wrote. The expected role of the teacher was to provide models of good essays for students to emulate so that they could pass the NCEE, which is considered to be very important for their future success. Writing is seen as a means of developing language skills and writing the kinds of compositions for passing the examination.

Students' knowledge and perceptions about writing

Even though students were not formally taught any strategies when writing their English essays, they were able to report on using some strategies.

In the cognitive model of Flower and Hayes (1981), *planning* involves a whole range of thinking activities before writing, such as generating ideas, setting goals and organizing. Given below are some pre-writing strategies reported by this group of Chinese students and examples of what students described about their planning strategies.

- analyzing topic/assignment
- generating/thinking of ideas
- deciding the main ideas
- organizing ideas
- drafting mentally — write directly from the mind
- free-writing — writing down ideas

> Before I start writing, I usually think over what the topic mean, what my main ideas about the topic are, how many ideas, and how to express my ideas in a good organization. (S2)
>
> Before I write I just think out one of the aspects of the topic. Then write and write. Usually when I am writing another aspect bursts into my brain, and after a while I write it down. So when I am writing ideas come into my brain. This is my own process in writing. (S7)
>
> I usualy try to recall something connected with the topic. Then I decide what to write and how to write, for example, how can I place the examples and where shall I show my idea. That is to say, I 'write' the essay in my heart first. Then I write fast. Without much hesistation. (S20)

Writing refers to the process of using language to transcribe ideas and thoughts into a written text. These are some examples of writing strategies reported by the Chinese students.

- focusing on correct grammar and sentences
- searching for supporting ideas
- organizing ideas
- translating from L1
- consulting a bilingual dictionary
- thinking in English

These are what some students reported about their writing process.

> While I are writing, I concentrate on search for some things to support my ideas, and pay attention to write sentences with correct grammar and spelling. (S2)
>
> And while I am writing, the Chinese meanings will appear in my mind first, then I translate them into English and write down on the paper. When I don't know what the English is for a word, I have to look it up in the Chinese-English dictionary. (S17)
>
> While writing, list my main points. Relate one to others. Try my best to make them in a good logic order. I'm attempting to think in English, but in some parts, I have to use Chinese first. (S13)

Reviewing refers to reading, evaluating, rethinking, revising, and editing. The reviewing strategies that the Chinese students reported using are as follows, with examples of students' descriptions given below:

- self-editing of errors
- obtaining feedback from classmates
- rereading and revising
- making a neat copy
- considering constraints of time

> Finished writing. Read it again. Correct some mistakes and think of the main points. (S13)
>
> At last I finish the writing. I'll look it over and check if there are some mistakes. Maybe I will change the writings with my classmates and have a look. (S17).
>
> After finishing writing, I'd like to read again and correct the wrong words. If I have enough time, I'd like to copy another one. I think the first one is dirty. I always make marks on the paper. (S14)

The analysis of students' written accounts of their writing process seems to suggest that the students have knowledge about the use of writing strategies in planning, writing and reviewing. Use of writing strategies may not be unfamiliar to these students as they could have acquired them from their writing experiences in L1. Research has shown that L1 composing strategies could be transferred to L2 (Edelsky, 1982; Jones and Tetroe, 1987).

Because of students' inadequate language proficiency, they relied on translation during composing to express their thoughts and ideas in English. Studies have shown that the use of L1 during the act of writing is a fairly common strategy among L2 writers (Friendlander, 1990; Wong, 1994)). However, these students also realized that translation did not work all the time, as described by these two students:

> And because my first language is Chinese, so I often express what I think in Chinese way not in English way and sometimes make some joke, which I called Chinese-English. (S1)
>
> Sometimes I wrote some Chinese-English sentences, what's more I wrote phrases that couldn't be understood by others. (S4)

In conferencing with students, they did voice their concern about translating when composing in L2 as they viewed it as a reflection of their inability to think and use English spontaneously as in their L1. As such, they had to frequently consult their bilingual dictionary to find the English words they did not know in order to express themselves. They said they often had to simplify their ideas due to the lack of knowledge of English words to express exactly what they wanted to say. Therefore, writing is a struggle for these students, whose overriding concern about their writing ability is in their language proficiency rather than the construction of meaning.

In the process of reviewing their papers, most students said that they focused on editing for errors rather than on evaluating and thinking over what they had written. Their emphasis on looking for errors could be a result of their previous writing experiences in which students were expected to write essays without

errors as one student described his experience: 'Our teacher told us use simple sentences and use the words we knew well. Our compositions must be not much mistakes.' Besides, they were conscious of their poor language skills; hence they had to pay more attention to checking for errors.

The students' attitudes towards writing were negative and showed lack of confidence in their writing ability. Practically all the students perceived writing to be 'a hard job' and more difficult compared to other language tasks such as reading, speaking and listening.

> My writing is poor. (S3)
>
> I think writing is a hard job. I like reading books. But I don't like to write compositions. (S2)
>
> I think writing is more difficult than speaking and listening. (S18)

However, one student did indicate that he liked writing in English as it helped him to think in English.

> However, I've got some joy from writing in English. That makes me think in English only in a short time, and I often got some new ideas which I can't get in the course of writing and thinking in Chinese. (S9)

In this writing class, students were not given models to follow. As a result, they had to think of ideas and express them on their own which might have encouraged the use of English in their thinking process. In highly controlled writing, students merely perform mechanical changes in their compositions rather than creating their own sentences to express their thoughts and ideas.

In addition, some students felt frustrated and 'embarrassed' when writing because of their inadequate language and vocabulary as shown by some of their written responses.

> Many a time I'm embarrassed when I'm not able to find a good word to express my real ideas because short of vocabulary. That's most boring things to a learning-writing student like me. (S6)

Students' negative attitude and feeling toward writing is mainly caused by their low confidence in using a language that is foreign to them. One can empathize with their frustration and struggle to write in another language when they are fluent writers in their own language.

Students' knowledge and perceptions about learning to write strategies

This knowledge refers to what students thought were effective learning to write strategies for developing their writing ability. Here are some strategies that the Chinese students perceived to be effective in improving their writing.

Learning strategies: students' reports

Hard work can improve writing ability

> But I think I will write well so long as I work hard. (S20) I believe that I can make rapid progress under your direction as long as I study hard. (S16)

Need teacher's help and guidance

> I hope teacher can teach us a good method. (S4) I'm eager to get teachers' help to improve my writing skills. (S15)

Improve writing through practice

> I think the more we write, the better we write. (19) I must do some exercises about writing every day. (S2)

Increase vocabulary by remembering words

> I need to remember more words. (S2)
>
> I think at present I can do nothing but recite many many English words. (S6)

Read to improve vocabulary

> What I need to do to improve my own writing is reading more... especially learning new words, idioms and sentences to express what I mean clearly and properly. (S8)

Write journal/diaries

> I think we should keep writing journal everyday and increase the number of words. (S4)
>
> I always like to write diaries each day. I usually write very fast because they are my own secret... I think this is a good way to improve writing ability. (S7)

Here we can see that students perceived writing as a skill that could be improved through practice and hard work. Increasing their vocabulary through reading and remembering words is necessary in developing their writing ability. That is why it is not surprising to observe students reciting and memorizing words which they have written down in their little notebooks. These learning strategies are all related to language because the students' writing problems and concerns were expressed as incorrect use of grammar and sentence structures and inability to express themselves in English due to limited vocabulary.

> The problems that I have in writing are grammar and the use of English. I often write long sentence, but I can't use the grammar freely, so some mistakes often appear in my essay. (S1)
>
> I often feel my vocabulary is too limited, so I can't express my meanings thoroughly. (S15)

The students expect the teacher to show them the correct way and provide them the guidance and advice on how to improve their language ability in writing. The teacher is to show them a good method that teaches them how to develop their writing skills through language and vocabulary development and use of good model essays. This seems to indicate that they felt that the approach used in China was helpful in these aspects. They were able to pass the National Entrance College Exam. Therefore, it is not surprising to read in their journals the following suggestions as to what they think the teacher could do to help them improve their writing. These were all related to their previous classroom learning experiences and writing concerns.

> In class I hope the teacher tell us more about the skills of writing, teach more adj and adv words to help us describe. (S5)
>
> Give us more advice on how to increase our vocabulary. (S1)
>
> I think the teacher may read some model essays. I think now we're learning language. (S9)

Pedagogical implications

Based on students' descriptions about their prior learning and writing experiences that emphasized accuracy of linguistic skills, it is evident that writing is perceived as a means to improve their English language. This view is also reflected in their writing concerns as well as their perceptions on the best ways they could improve their writing. It is also apparent that their objective is to write correct sentences and to learn vocabulary that enables them to express their ideas. This is understandable as these Chinese students were learning a language that was still not familiar to them since they had only six years of English instruction. Therefore, in their minds, they knew that their language was not proficient enough and that they needed to improve their language before they could write well. It also appeared that these students had procedural knowledge about writing strategies which they acquired in their L1.

In view of students' learning experiences, needs and expectations, teaching writing that focuses on the process of discovery meaning rather than the product could result in a mismatch of expectations. In teaching writing to

these Chinese learners, we cannot ignore the necessity and importance of language development from the students' perspective. Otherwise, the students may feel that they are not learning much from the class in terms of improving their writing skills, that is, the ability to express themselves with correct sentence structures and appropriate word choices. The teacher is expected to guide and advise them on how to write well and improve their vocabulary, or they may perceive the teacher's method as ineffective. According to Silva (1992), teachers 'need to be aware of and sensitive to their students' perceptions about writing and expectations regarding instruction' and develop teaching and learning practices that 'support and encourage, rather than alienate their students' (p.44). The findings of this exploratory study seem to indicate that to meet some of the students' expectations of learning, we need to pay attention to both product and process in teaching these students.

The students' reports on their writing process suggest they possessed procedural knowledge on the use of writing strategies during planning, writing, and reviewing. Teaching of planning and writing strategies may not be necessary since they would have much experience in writing essays in their L1. In fact, in one of the class essays they wrote on differences between Chinese and English writing, most students felt that the process of writing between the two languages was similar. The main difference was in the language and the use of idioms. This means that we may not need to teach planning and writing strategies to these students. What would be more beneficial is to focus more on collaborative learning and revising strategies. This could expose students to learning strategies that encourage students to see writing as an interactive process and not only as a language learning task. More class time could be spent on peer-review using criteria that evaluate both the ideas and views of the author and language usage. On the other hand, we could help the students to believe that the act of writing itself will provide them the practice of using the language which will eventually improve their proficiency.

From this study, one important affective factor that teachers have to be conscious of in teaching these students is their lack of confidence. They think of themselves as poor writers and feel that writing is difficult for them because of their poor English, even though they could be good writers in their L1. We need to help them realize that writing is, in fact, 'a struggle, even for the most experienced writers' (Ivanic, 1997) in any language. On the other hand, it is important for us to understand the struggle and frustration that these students experience when writing in a second or foreign language. These students require

constant positive encouragement and support from the teacher to raise their confidence by taking risks in constructing their own ideas and sentences, without the fear of making mistakes. One way is to avoid assessing their writing ability based on accuracy and filling their essays with red marks. In addition, providing positive feedback when students take risks in their writing may shift their focus away from mere accuracy to see writing as a means of constructing meaning with one's own ideas. Such feedback could be given through written responses on students' drafts or during student conferencing.

Conclusion

This study has indicated that the PRC Chinese students' prior writing and learning experiences in L2 were product-oriented and exam-based with much attention given to language development. The teaching of writing was highly structured and guided with the use of models and translation. These learning experiences have shaped their perceptions of writing which views writing as a means for developing language skills rather than as a thinking process in the construction of meaning. It is also apparent that these students have knowledge of writing and learning to write strategies acquired in their L1 which are helpful in developing their writing ability.

As second language writing teachers, we are concerned about what students need to know and learn in order to become good writers. Very often we teach according to what we think is best for the students and how effectively students could learn from our classes based on our views and assumptions about teaching and learning. However, insights from this study suggest that students may not necessarily share the same assumptions we do. For successful teaching and learning to occur in the classroom, teachers need to take into consideration the students' knowledge and perceptions about writing and learning and develop teaching practices that could bridge any mismatches between teachers' expectations and assumptions and that of their students. Reciprocal teaching and learning practices with continuous student feedback and input on learning tasks and activities could help narrow the gap of any mismatch in expectations and raise students' awareness about their perceptions of writing and learning.

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The message of marking: teachers' attitudes to the writing of ESL students

Vivian Li Yuk Yi

Literature background

Many researchers have attempted to study the effectiveness of teachers' feedback on students' writing. They find focus on both form and content significant. For instance, Fathman and Whalley (1985) suggest that students who receive feedback on form make greater improvement on writing tasks than those who do not, a view shared by Lalande (1982) and Robb, Ross & Shortreed (1986). Fathman and Whalley (1990) claim that feedback on content also helps improve students' writing. General comments like giving encouragement and suggesting revision help to improve the content of composition rewrites.

Researchers (McAlpine, 1989; Burt & Kiparsky, 1972; Cohen, 1975; Hendrickson, 1980) have proposed a variety of response strategies found to be significant in helping students. These include:

Think-aloud protocols	Teachers tape-record the feedback to students instead of writing on their piece of work
Combination of direct and indirect correction treatment	Teachers identify part of the errors by giving a marking code (indirect treatment) or simply inserting the correct form for the students (direct treatment)
Partial marking	Teachers concentrate on marking a particular type of error e.g., those on prepositions and tenses, and ignore other errors
Peer correction	Students exchange their work with their peers and identify each other's errors
Self-correction	Learners are encouraged to revise their work several times and correct their own errors.

Use of diagnostic charts	Teachers record the learners' errors on a chart in order to reveal their problems in learning

This list is by no means exhaustive and the strategies have been used separately or in combination to suit teacher preferences and students' needs.

Study

This study investigated some Hong Kong teachers' attitudes toward a variety of responses to Form Two students' writing in secondary schools. It had the following objectives:

1. To investigate teachers' responses to students' writing.
2. To find out teachers' perception of and attitudes to current ideas on scoring strategies.
3. To explore students' views / expectations towards teachers' scoring strategies.

The subjects are six teachers and 30 students from two schools considered to be average. Data was collected through interviews and two sets of questionnaires. An analysis was also conducted on a sample of teachers' marking of student writing totalling 237 scripts.

Findings and discussion

The teachers' actual behaviour as revealed in their marking of students' sample texts showed that they responded to writing as a fixed and final product. Emphasis was put mainly on grammatical accuracy of writing. The few comments that were made were usually vague, abstract and not text-specific. Teachers also frequently misread students' texts and made arbitrary and/or inaccurate corrections. The inference made from the examination of actual teacher responses is that teachers may not know much about helping students improve their writing. Part of the reason may be that they view writing as a way to improve language rather than to teach writing processes.

The data from the questionnaires and interviews support the above analysis as teachers reported that they do not use a wide range of responses to students' writing. Teachers seemed aware that their current practices were not helping students. They commented that despite their focus on grammar and the mechanics, students continued to repeat their errors. However, teachers reported that they were 'forced' to continue with their current marking strategies because of constraints such as time and students' low standards of English. Pressure from schools, parents and students have also discouraged some from

trying alternatives. It seems that the school's and parent's attitudes to and perception of new approaches ought to be changed to enable students to benefit from writing classes.

When questioned about the range of teacher responses to student writing, the students showed great variation and did not favour any one particular category. This can suggest that different modes may suit different individuals better. Alternatively, it may suggest that the students themselves do not exactly know what they want or what would benefit them because they have not had the opportunity to experience alternative practices. A recommendation could be that teachers rotate different modes of feedback in the academic year in order to help students discover the modes most appropriate for them.

This study suggests that teachers should re-examine their own practices to discover how they can best respond to students' writing. Students in this study said that they appreciated comments teachers make about their work, especially the encouraging ones. Therefore, teachers should find time to make text-specific comments, instructions and recommendations to help students reflect on and learn from those comments. As teachers, we should bear in mind that we need to respond as interested readers not merely as proofreaders. We need to remember that we are responding to student writers rather than student writing.

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An investigation of EFL college students' listening comprehension: A case study of cadets studying English at the Chinese Military Academy

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Listening comprehension is viewed conceptually as an active and conscious process in which the listener constructs meanings by using cues from contextual information and from the listener's prior knowledge. Multiple strategic resources are required to fulfil the task requirements of listening comprehension (O'Malley, Chamot & Kupper, 1989). The whole process is a covert activity that involves many complicated mental steps. This study sets out to investigate the strategies used by cadets in the Chinese Military Academy (CMA) to comprehend an oral text in English as a Foreign Language. In particular, I wanted to explore how cadets comprehended a text by the application of learning strategies learned from the strategies training class.

The subjects in this study were all enrolled in the Advanced English Class. Thirty senior cadets (16 low-intermediate and 14 high-beginners) were randomly selected as research subjects. The cadets' language levels were measured by the Secondary Level English Proficiency Test (SLEPT, 1989) to assign the cadets to different levels of proficiency. A pilot study was also conducted to make sure that the taped texts were suitable for the students' language levels. After the pilot study, the cadets were asked to think aloud on three taped texts in English. Each student was specifically required to say what he was thinking, in order to comprehend what he had heard at different stages of a listening task. Though the listening task was in English, the whole interview session was conducted in the subject's native language, i.e., Chinese and was tape-recorded.

Protocols were created for each cadet by transcribing their verbal reports and analysing the strategies they used, according to categories established by previous research (Carrell, 1984; Palincsar & Brown, 1984, 1985). The results of this study indicated that the majority of the more effective learners used strategies such as *prediction, inference, translation, elaboration, grasping the main idea, listening sentence-by-sentence,* and *key words* to comprehend their listening task.

Generally, it can be said that the less effective comprehender was more inclined to overgeneralize what they know, revealed a lack of flexibility, vocabulary power, and analytical and synthesizing ability, relied heavily on lexical meanings and showed a low degree of tolerance for ambiguity. In contrast, better comprehenders seemed more willing to take risks and make guesses, attended constantly to meaning, and consistently monitored, modified and made relevant associations while attending to the overall meaning of the text.

Evidence from the protocol analysis in this study supported psycholinguists' claims that the comprehension process can be viewed as a 'psycholinguistic guessing game' (Goodman, 1976; Coady, 1979; Devine, 1983). In other words, during the comprehension process, the listener is constantly forming, testing, rejecting, accepting, and revising predictions about different aspects of the text on the basis of a sampling of textual clues. The efficient listener, compared to the less efficient listener, indicated a strong tendency to be risk-takers with the ability to form predictions about the upcoming text. Meanwhile, they are able to keep deliberate attention on the text they are listening to, to activate a myriad of relevant schemata as well as to be sensitive enough to monitor the connection between the content in the speaker's text and the listener's own knowledge. While there is obviously no one 'best' strategy, the more effective listener has many different alternatives and is more likely to choose the most relevant ones on the basis of the overall meaning rather than depend on single lexical cues.

The results of this study strongly suggest that teachers should emphasize process-oriented learning rather than product-oriented learning. Traditional instructional emphases may encourage students to use inefficent listening strategies of attention at word or sentence levels. Instead, more emphasis should be placed on strategies used by the more effective listeners who tended to be more resourceful, to be more flexible and to use more varied strategies. Moreover, strategy training in listening comprehension should purposefully stress the metacognitive dimension. That is, teachers should promote metacognitive discussions (to develop self-awareness of strategy use) that will encourage students to talk about and reflect on their listening comprehension problems and the strategies used to solve them. This includes discussion of when, how, and why certain strategies are chosen. At the same time, students should be helped to compare and contrast the various problem-solving strategies used by their peers in order to identify those that are most successful for them.

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The effects of well-written texts and glossaries on the comprehension of academic texts

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Background literature

Research in reading (e.g., Armbruster, Anderson & Ostertag, 1987; Meyer, 1987) has demonstrated that well-written texts and knowledge of text structures facilitate reading comprehension, particularly of main ideas. Studies in English as second language (ESL) reading demonstrate similar findings (Carrell, 1985, 1992). A good command of English grammar and vocabulary has also been found necessary for ESL/EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners to comprehend texts (Cowan, 1974; Strother & Ulijn, 1987). This study is aimed at finding out if well-written texts and glossaries would help Indonesian EFL students comprehend the main ideas of an expository text. The term 'well-written texts' was used in this study to refer to expository texts which have clear text structures with the inclusion of discourse signals (Meyer, 1975). This study addressed the following questions:

- What strategies do subjects use to comprehend the main ideas of an expository text?
- What do subjects think about and expect from reading comprehension instruction?

Details of the study

A total of 108 students majoring in English as a foreign language at a three-year private college in a city in Central Java read a 3500-word text modified from Colborn and Liroff (1990). The text was chosen because it contains the problem-solution structure, frequently used in social science texts and which normally embeds a cause-effect structure. Four versions were developed from the original text. Each subject read only one of the following four versions:

- Version A was well-written and had a glossary in Indonesian
- Version B was well-written without a glossary

- Version C was not well-written but had a glossary
- Version D was not well-written and was without a glossary

The purpose of providing a glossary was to reduce the time spent in looking up difficult words so that subjects would spend more time using more beneficial strategies, such as identifying the text structure, comprehending the main ideas, etc.

There were seven questions, including inferential ones, on the main ideas. In addition, subjects answered a questionnaire based on O'Malley and Chamot's inventory (1993) of EFL learners' strategies (see also Ridwan &Wahyuningsih, 1997) to find out what they thought about reading comprehension and what strategies they used to understand the information. All questions were in Indonesian. Comprehension was measured by the number of correct answers to the questions and the number of main ideas in the summaries.

Results and discussion

No significant differences were found between the four conditions on the comprehension measures (Table 1). These results did not support the hypothesis that a well-written text and the presence of a glossary would help subjects to comprehend the main ideas of an expository text.

Table 1 Results of two-way ANOVA

Source	SS	df	MS	F	Significant
Main effect	1				
Text structure	0.532	1	0.532	0.348	Not
Glossary	1.64	1	1.64	1.07	Not
Text structure x Glossary	0.729	1	0.729	0.471	Not
Error	159.051	104	1.53		
Total	161.91	107	1.51		

From the low comprehension scores, it is reasonable to deduce that the text is probably very difficult for most subjects, even with the help of a glossary. Another possible reason is that the subjects lacked training in efficient reading strategies. This was supported by the analyses of the students' responses to the questionnaire used to probe knowledge of reading strategies.

Table 2 shows a collation of student responses to the questionnaire. While most students claimed they used good reading strategies, many students were not aware of important ones like summarizing and note-taking which are good

comprehension strategies for reading long, difficult texts, such as academic materials. Indeed, most students' summaries gave a lot of unnecessary detail.

Table 2 Strategies used to comprehend main ideas

Strategies	Frequency (in %)	Always	Frequently	Sometimes	Rarely/ Never
Predicting from title	35	19	42	4	0
Identifying text structure	15	24	37	15	9
Utilizing signals	10	17	27	36	10
Mentally translating words	10	23	44	19	4
Reading topic sentence	25	15	40	19	1
Attending to main ideas	30	36	23	7	4
Underlining topic sentence	13	8	32	30	17
Summarizing	1	8	18	37	36
Looking up difficult words	37	24	29	9	1
Reading extensively	17	27	42	13	1
Guessing words from context	13	35	42	6	4
Notetaking	6	6	32	24	32

N = 108

Another possible reason for the low comprehension scores may lie in the nature of the questions. A previous study found that Indonesian students were more familiar with factual questions which they frequently found in textbooks or were given by their teachers (Ridwan, Moorrees & Suharna, 1996). Inferential questions would thus be very difficult for many subjects.

Implications

Future studies will need to experiment with easier texts to find out if the same result persists. The results from the responses of the students on their reading strategies indicate areas for instructional focus. The emphasis of the 1994 English Language Teaching Curriculum for secondary schools in Indonesia is on reading for self-development in arts as well as in science and technology. The same goes for reading instruction in tertiary education. Current ideas for efficient reading strategies could help these students, for example, identifying text structures and using discourse signals (Armbruster, Anderson & Ostertag, 1987, 1989; Berkowitz, 1986; Carrell, 1985, 1992; Lee & Riley, 1990; Ohlhausen & Roller, 1988). Summarizing and note-taking should also be frequently practised.

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